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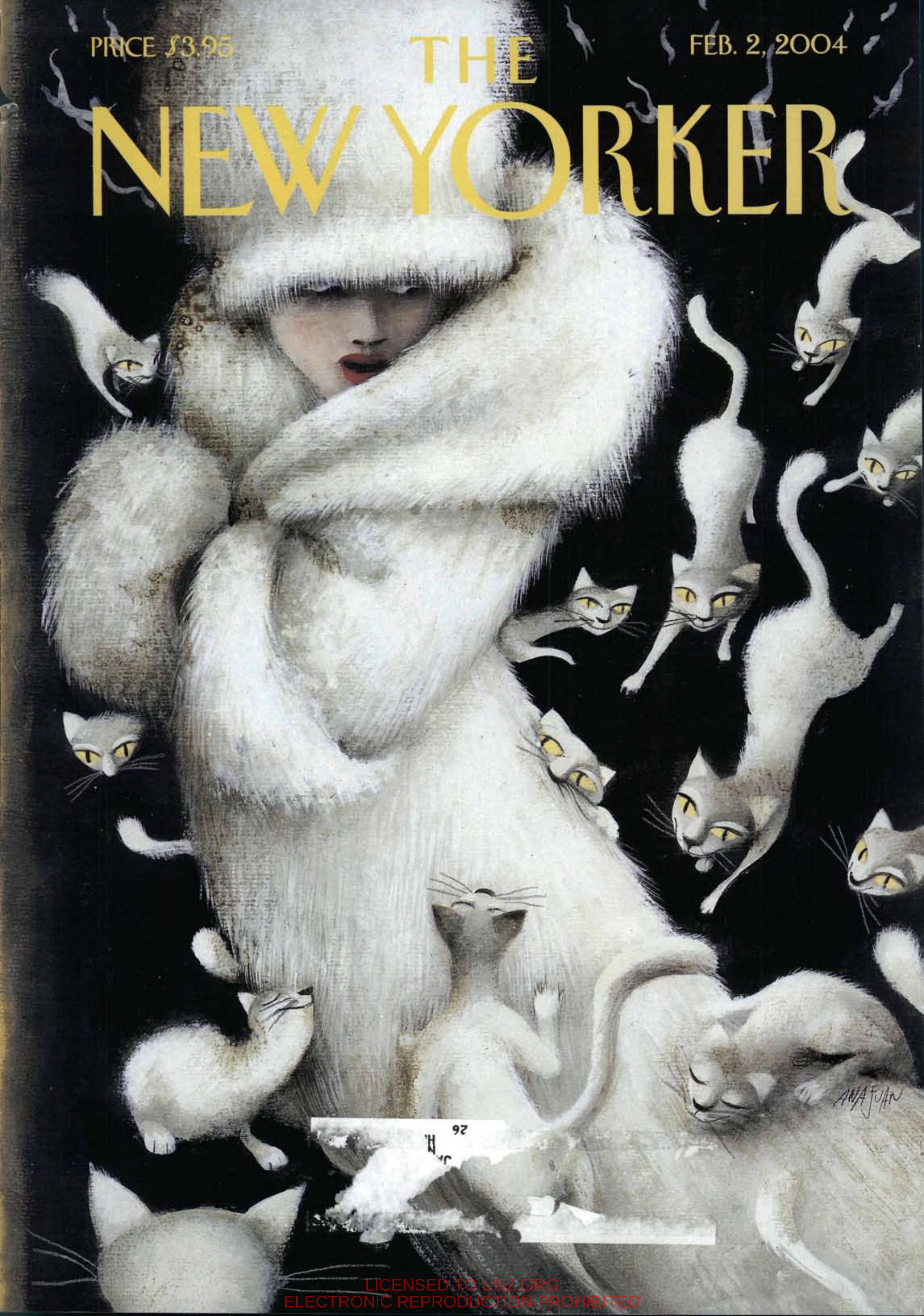

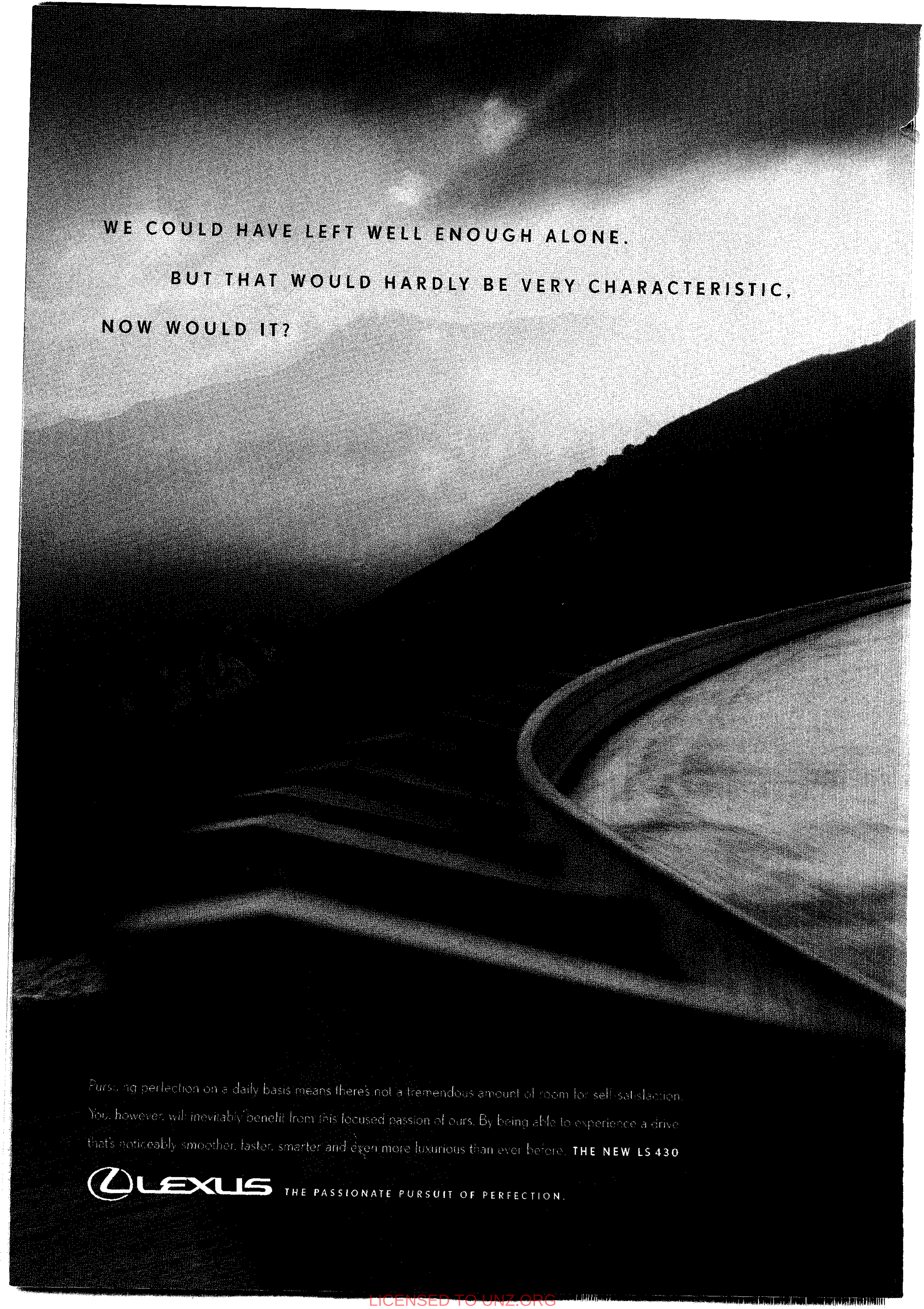

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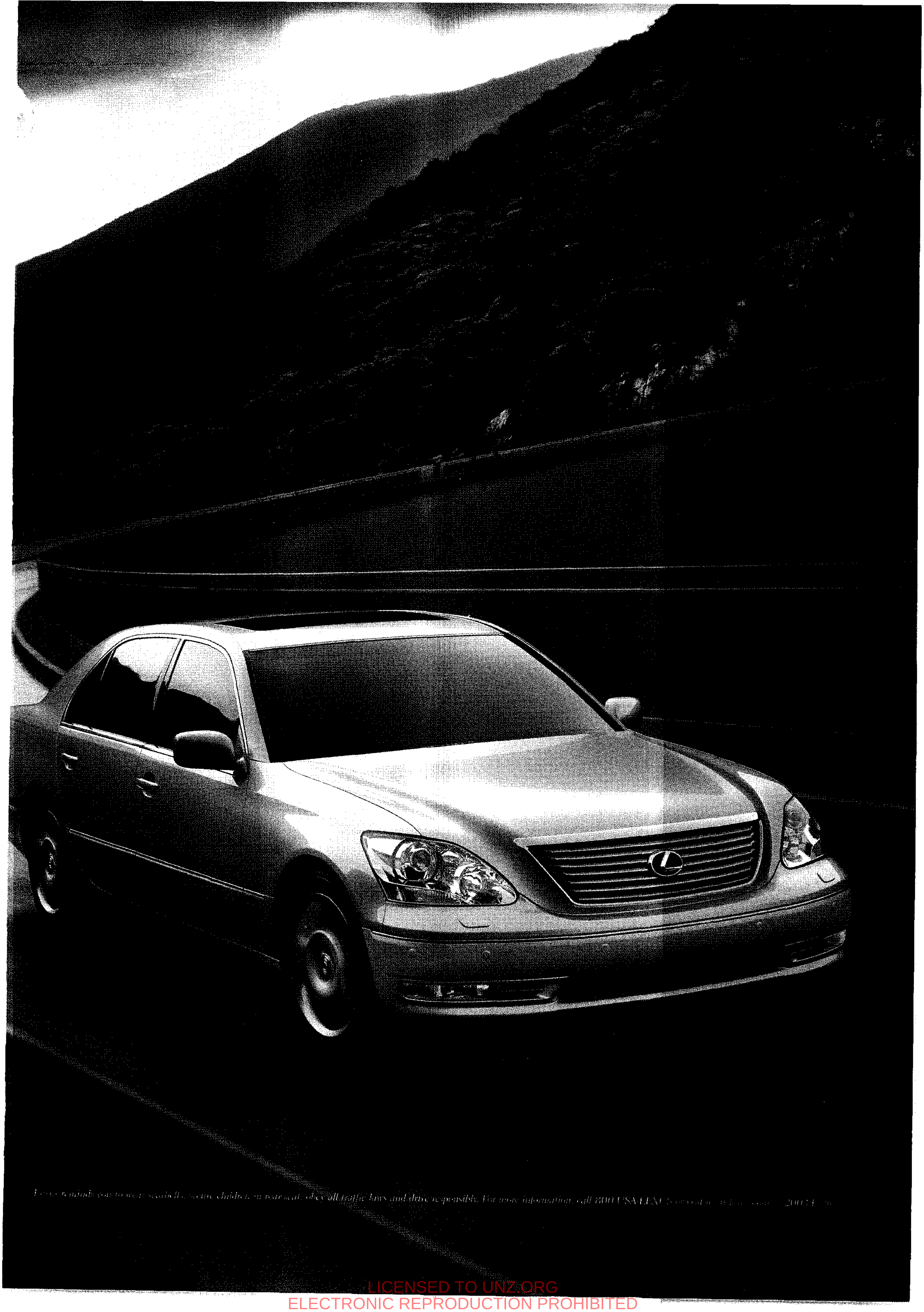

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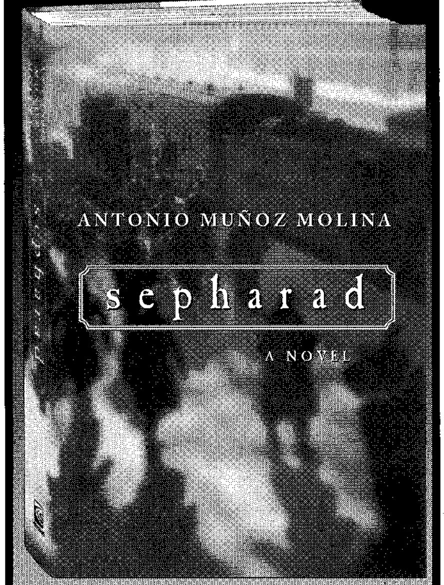

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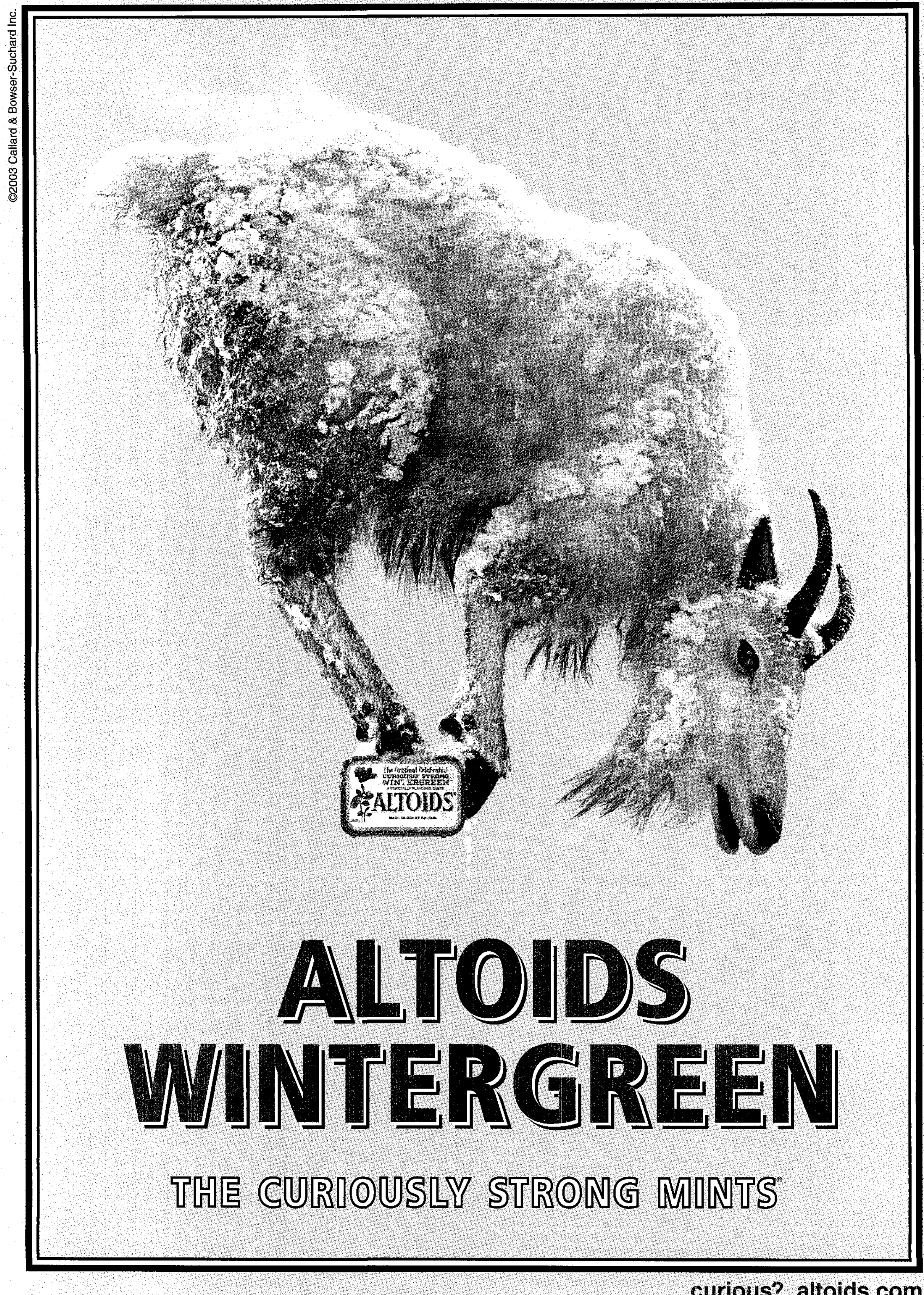
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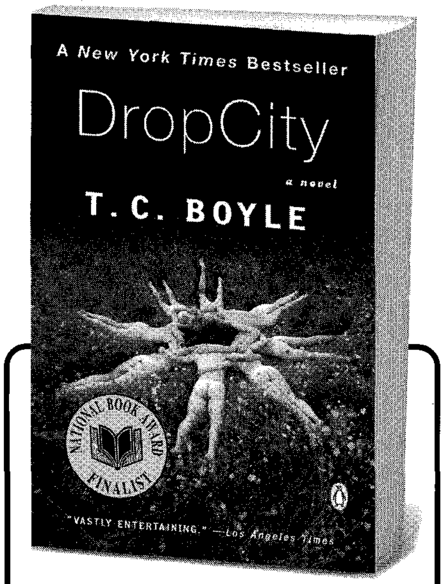
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Jon Lee Anderson ("The Candidate," p. 50) is writing a book about the fall of Baghdad, which will be published later this year.

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Michael Specter ("Miracle in a Bottle," p. 64), a staff writer, covers science and public-health issues for the magazine.

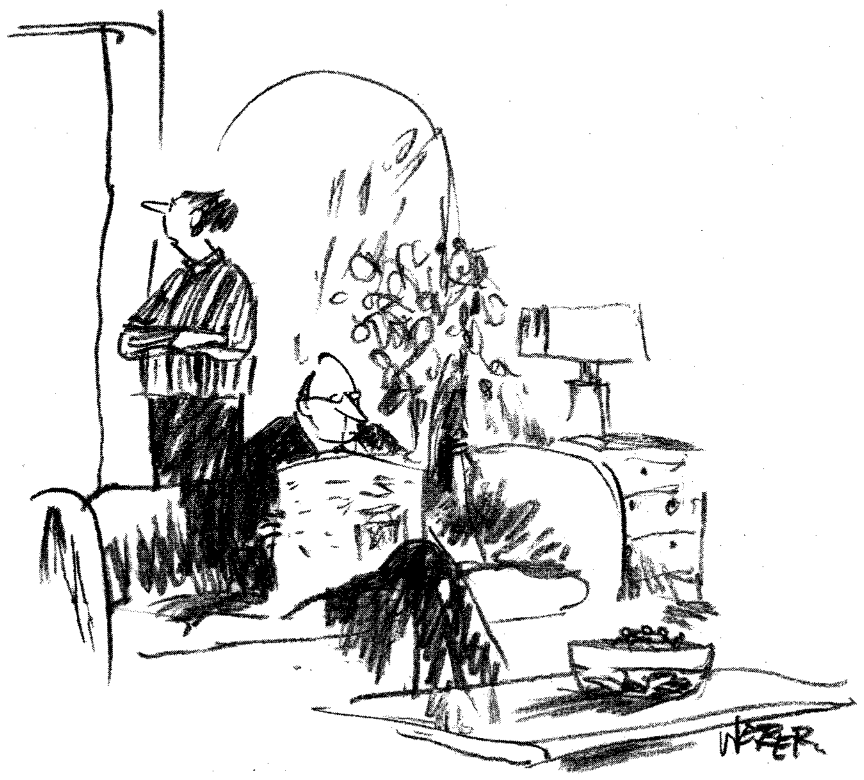
John Updike (Fiction, p. 76) published a collection of his short fiction, "The Early Stories: 1953-1975," in October.

Patricia Marx (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 34) writes for film and television. She is currently working on a pilot called "The Smokers' Club."

Joshua Micah Marshall (A Critic at Large, p. 83) is the editor of the Web site Talkingpointsmemo.com. He writes for *The Washington Monthly* and *The Hill*, a Washington newspaper.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 90), the magazine's senior theatre critic, is working on a biography of Tennessee Williams.

Alex Gregory (The Back Page, p. 96) is a cartoonist and television writer living in Los Angeles. His cartoons have appeared in the magazine since 1999. ♦



"I'd like Daniel Libeskind to take a look at our kitchen."

THE MAIL

ARABIAN ILLUSIONS

What is particularly frightening in Lawrence Wright's report on the oppressiveness and disintegration of Saudi society is that young Saudis see no future for themselves ("The Kingdom of Silence," January 5th). Americans need to be asking hard questions about the illusion, nurtured by our own media and by successive American governments, of Saudi Arabia and its ruling monarchy as stalwart, moderate allies that can be relied on to serve our economic and strategic interests. The Saudi Ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, and other members of the royal family have managed to keep this crumbling edifice in the sands out of sight and out of mind for most Americans. If we have come to realize only now, when it is too late, that the kingdom is in a downward spiral, we have nothing to blame but our own self-inflicted blindness.

Leo Rennert
Bethesda, Md.

Wright recounts that he was initially alarmed by the anti-American slant in Saudi press coverage of the Iraq war, and then, after the government called in all the editors-in-chief and ordered them to "drop their anti-American line," felt "a sullied sense of relief" that the newspapers "suddenly appeared more sober and responsible." However this incident appeared, there is little that is reassuring in it. The Saudi princes demanded, for their own completely mercenary purposes, that the papers change their position toward the war. Was it "responsible" that they acceded? Hardly. One would hope that Wright was not so immersed in the ideology of his own government that he couldn't recognize that this enforced pro-Americanism was as biased as the previous hard-core anti-Americanism.

Amelia Jones
Manchester, England

Wright does an excellent job of describing the ills of Saudi Arabia's ruling élite and its detrimental effects on Saudi society—until he describes the stoning of three pillars at Jamarat as a ritual performed by pilgrims in memory of unsuccessful attempts by Satan to lead Mohammed astray. It was Abraham, not Mohammed, who was tempted.

Faisal Memon
New York City

DEATH TO THE S.U.V.

When sport-utility vehicles were created, the Big Three automakers sold them as people movers, but prevailed upon the government to classify them as trucks ("Big and Bad," January 12th). They thus avoided both the safety regulations that Malcolm Gladwell discusses and fuel economy (CAFE) standards. The attitude of the automakers was that they made powerful four-wheel-drive S.U.V.s for customers who really needed their off-road capabilities and lugging capacity; if suburban families felt that the vehicles matched their life style, the manufacturers could hardly be held responsible—as if the entire marketing strategy weren't directed at such customers. If the automakers had admitted the truth back then, they might have been required to raise the vehicle's gas mileage to CAFE standards (an almost impossible task with a five-thousand-pound S.U.V.), and its safety standards to car levels. These changes would have killed their cash cow. Why should this matter? Why shouldn't people be able to buy whatever they want? Aside from the many safety issues that Gladwell identifies, if every minivan and S.U.V. ever purchased were replaced by a family-size car, we would not need to import oil from Saudi Arabia. And that alone should be reason enough to kill the S.U.V.

Kenny Herbert
Brooklyn, N.Y.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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For expanded events listings, please visit www.newyorker.com/goingson.

THIS WEEK

THE PURE AND THE IMPURE

The first week of the New York Flamenco Festival mixes tradition and experiment. On Thursday, the *bailaora* Manuela Carrasco, one of the premier practitioners of *flamenco puro*, headlines a gala program that includes the legendary Gypsy singer Chocolate and the modernist dancer Israel Galván, the "Nijinsky of flamenco." On Friday, Sara Baras forgoes the narrative ballet she presented last year for a more conventional piece that shows off her extraordinarily fleet footwork, and, on Saturday and Sunday, Compañía Andaluza de Danza offers an impassioned production of Antonio Gades's "Blood Wedding" (based on the Lorca play). The Sunday program also includes "La Leyenda," a tribute to Carmen Amaya. (City Center, Jan. 29-Feb. 1; see Dance.)

NO TIME FLAT

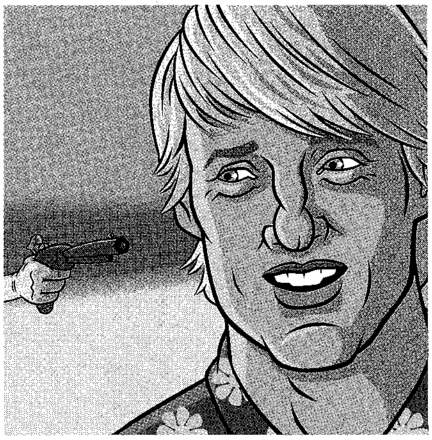
Thirty years ago in Lubbock, Texas, three friends—Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely, and Butch Hancock—briefly recorded together as the Flatlanders. The band, which combined an outlaw aesthetic with progressive leanings, had little commercial success, but it helped to launch the alt-country movement. After successful solo careers, the Flatlanders reunited two years ago; this week, they come to town to play material from their new album, "Wheels of Fortune." (Bowery Ballroom, Jan. 28; see Night Life.)

ISLAND LIFE

The actor Owen Wilson has consistently been a scene-stealer, with his slightly stoned delivery and improvised wit. In "The Big Bounce," he attempts to carry a movie. Elmore Leonard's first crime novel has been adapted before, in 1969, with Ryan O'Neal; Leonard called the result "awful." This version promises to be better: the role of Jack Ryan—a surfer/drifter/con man on the loose in Hawaii—seems suited to Wilson's easy charisma, and the director, George Armitage ("Miami Blues"), does his best work in warmer climes. (Opens Jan. 30; see Movies.)

The dancer Manuela Carrasco, at the New York Flamenco Festival.

The Flatlanders bring their brand of country music to the Bowery Ballroom.



MICHAEL WELDON

Owen Wilson stars in the crime caper "The Big Bounce."

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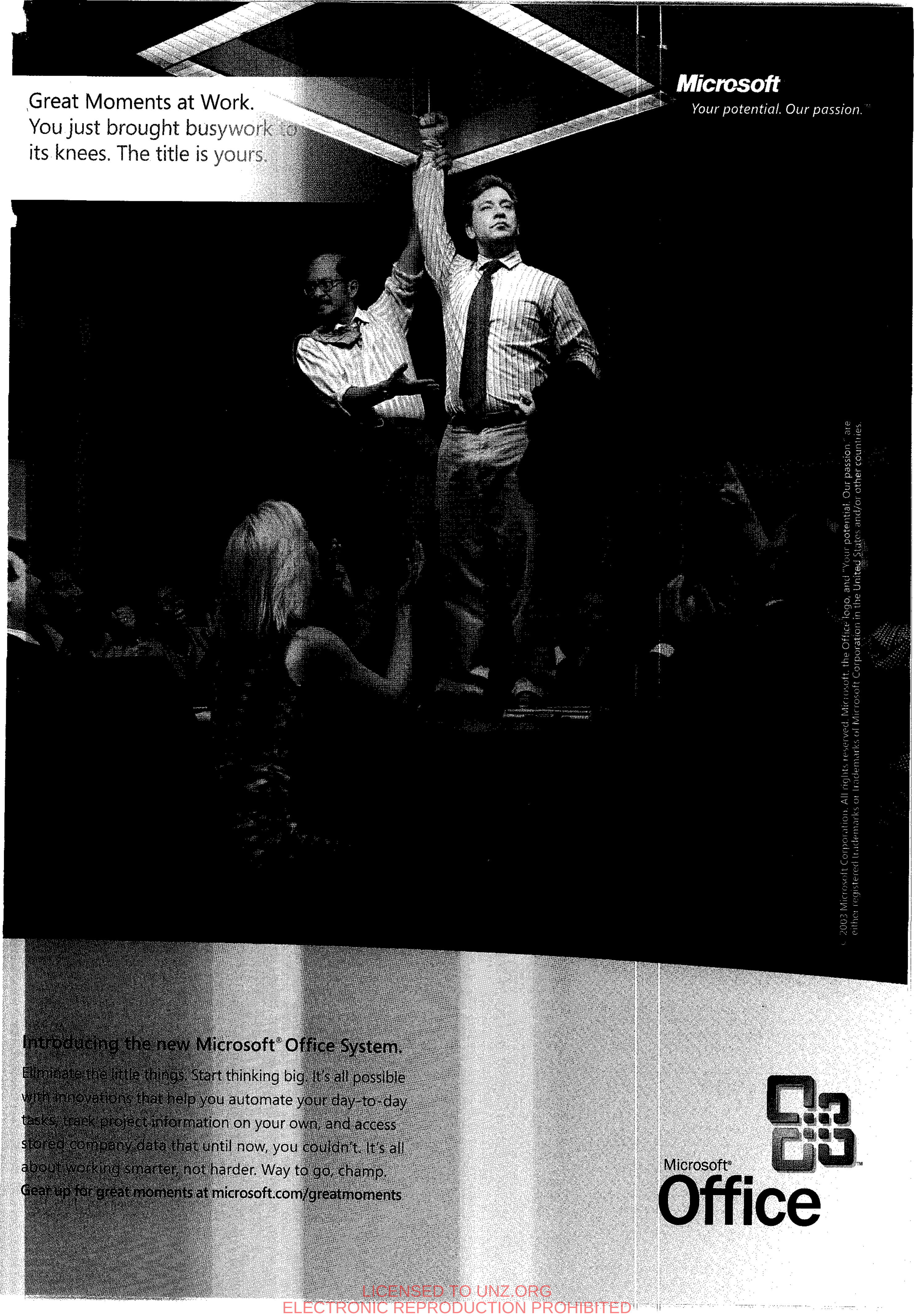

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AGAMEMNON
Olympia Dukakis and her husband, Louis Zorich, play Clytemnestra and Agamemnon in a new translation by Peter Meineck of Aeschylus' tragedy. An Aquila production. Directed by Meineck and Robert Richmond. Previews begin Feb. 3. (John Jay, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-239-6200.)

DROWNING CROW
Marion McClinton directs a Manhattan Theatre Club production of a new play by Regina Taylor ("Crowns") about the reunion of a family of African-American artists. Alfre Woodard leads the cast. Previews begin Jan. 29. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

EDEN
The Irish Rep presents the New York première of a play by Eugene O'Brien about a wife who plans a night out with her husband, not knowing he has plans with another woman. With Catherine Byrne and Ciarán O'Reilly. Directed by John Tillinger. In previews. Opens Feb. 1 at 7. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
Alfred Molina is Tevye, Randy Graff is Golde, and Barbara Barrie is Yente in a new Broadway production of the musical, directed by David Leveaux. In previews. (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

ROULETTE
The filmmaker Paul Weitz ("American Pie," "About a Boy") is also a playwright. Anna Paquin, Larry Bryggman, Ana Gasteyer, and Shawn Hatosy star in his new play, a dark comedy about a suburban father who plays with fate to add spice to his life. An Ensemble Studio Theatre production. Directed by Trip Cullman. Previews begin Jan. 30. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME
Primary Stages presents two short, thematically linked new plays by Terrence McNally: "Full Frontal Nudity," about tourists in Florence; and "Prelude and Liebestod," about an orchestra conductor in crisis. Richard Thomas and Isabella Rossellini—making her New York stage début—lead the cast. Directed by Leonard Foglia. Previews begin Feb. 1. (59E59 Theatre, 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THEY WROTE THAT?
The songwriters Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil (they wrote the Animals' hit "We've Gotta Get Out of This Place" and Dolly Parton's "Here You Come Again") star in a musical biography recapping their career in pop music. Directed by Richard Maltby, Jr., with sets by Neil Patel. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

VALHALLA
New York Theatre Workshop presents a new play by Paul Rudnick that contrasts the lives and passions of the Wagner-loving Mad King Ludwig II of Bavaria and a precocious teen-ager in Texas in the nineteen-forties. Directed by Christopher Ashley. In previews. (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

WINTERTIME
Marsha Mason stars in a Second Stage production of a new romantic comedy by Charles L. Mee. Directed by David Schweizer. Previews begin Feb. 3. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AUNT DAN AND LEMON
In the New Group's revival of Wallace Shawn's haunting and transcendent 1985 play, Lili Taylor plays Leonora, or Lemon, a woman who cultivates the garden of her memory in flashbacks dominated by a loquacious family friend she calls Aunt Dan (Kristen Johnston). Aunt Dan argues for the human face of fascism and reveals her desire for Henry Kissinger—whom she regards as one of the most eligible bachelors in the world (the political context is the nineteen-seventies). Just as Aunt Dan yearns to be overwhelmed by force—a male force—Lemon secretly desires to be overwhelmed by Aunt Dan. Directed by Scott Elliott. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/5/04.) (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

BOOBS: THE MUSICAL
The Arkansan chanteuse Gennifer Flowers has joined the cast of this goofy, louche revue of the ribald, Eisenhower-era songs of Ruth Wallis—which includes the ballad "Bill." Directed by Donna Drake. (Dillon's, 245 W. 54th St. 212-307-4100.)

DEMON BABY
Erin Courtney's new play for the Clubbed Thumb has Lynchian overtones (a demonic garden gnome disrupts the lives of a married couple). It could use more plot to anchor the whimsy, but Heidi Schreck is terrific as the guileless wife, Wren, who snaps early on, startling an effeminate visitor by stripping stark naked and offering him a gin and tonic. Directed by Ken Rus Schmoll. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444. Through Jan. 31.)

DOÑA ROSITA THE SPINSTER
A new production of Federico García Lorca's drama, adapted by Gwynne Edwards and directed by Ernest Johns, at the Jean Cocteau Repertory. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 212-677-0060.)

FIVE FLIGHTS
Adam Bock's new comedy takes on the role of religion in society, the transformative power of love and faith, and the unsuspected congruence of ice hockey and Russian ballet. By offering his thoughtful insights not in stage language but in everyday, slightly incoherent English, Mr. Bock makes his play both believable and comical. With fine acting (most notably by Joanna P. Adler) from a cast of six. Directed by Kent Nicholson. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

GOLF: THE MUSICAL
Among the eighteen songs in this amiable, madcap revue are a rock-gospel tribute to Tiger Woods and a new scheme for progressive American interventionism called "Let's Bring Golf to the Gulf." Apart from delivering their better-than-par melodies, the players also impersonate the devoted golfers Bob Hope and Bing Crosby and invite members of the audience onstage to join them in a putting contest. Directed by Christopher Scott. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

HIGH HEELS AND RED NOSES
The Bindlestiff Family Cirkus calls this production a "conflagration of circus and burlesque." As in any proper burlesque show, there are moments of questionable taste, but the performers' skills—there's even a real sword swallower—are presented with just enough irony to make the evening smart as well as saucy. (Palace of Variety, 125 W. 42nd St. 877-246-3537.)

KING COWBOY RUFUS RULES THE UNIVERSE
Richard Foreman is a poetic realist, and the psychic freedom in his work grows, oddly, out of his fixed obsessions—namely, female sexuality and his own Jewishness. In the latest Ontological-Hysteric production, Baron Herman De Voto (played by the versatile T. Ryder Smith), dressed like an errant rabbi in a dark suit and a stiff black wig, renounces his ownership of a tobacco factory, which it seems is the source of all social evil. Almost at once, King Cowboy Rufus (the gifted Jay Smith) decides to buy the tobacco factory, thereby saving the job of Susie Sitwell (Juliana Francis), who delivers her lines with the flat affect of a lobotomized but naughty ingénue. Rufus is a symbol of imperialism gone mad. "I'm no traitor. And I'll prove it easily with my subsequent violent behavior," he announces. Mayhem ensues. This play is one of the most overtly political of Foreman's recent works, but he balances its didacticism with a mordant wit. (1/26/04) (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-533-4650.)

MERCURY: THE AFTERLIFE AND TIMES OF A ROCK GOD
Fans hoping for Loser's Lounge-ish covers of "We Will Rock You" and "Bohemian Rhapsody" in this tribute to Queen's late lead singer, Freddie Mercury (Amir Darvish), will be disappointed; Charles Messina's powerful one-man show focusses on the man rather than the music. Messina explores Mercury's fractured identity as an upper-class Arab, a tortured prep-school boarder, a closeted homosexual, a drug addict (the set features a plate heaped with enough cocaine to make Tony Montana balk), and a high-camp celebrity. (Triad Theatre, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-352-3101.)

THE MYSTERIES
Biblical tales (of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Flood, etc.) drawn from the writings of Dario Fo, Mikhail Bulgakov, Tony Harrison, and others receive a violent staging from the director Brian Kulick. After Cain slays Abel, a large eye rises to illuminate his crime; later, Christ's crucifixion among a number of drunken gamblers evokes Scorsese and Tarantino. Bill Buell leads the cast. (Classic Stage, 136 E. 13th St. 212-677-4210.)

NEVER GONNA DANCE
Based on the classic 1936 movie "Swing Time," starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, this effervescent new musical is a scrapbook of Depression-era reality made Art Deco shiny. Directed by Michael Greif and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. (12/15/03) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

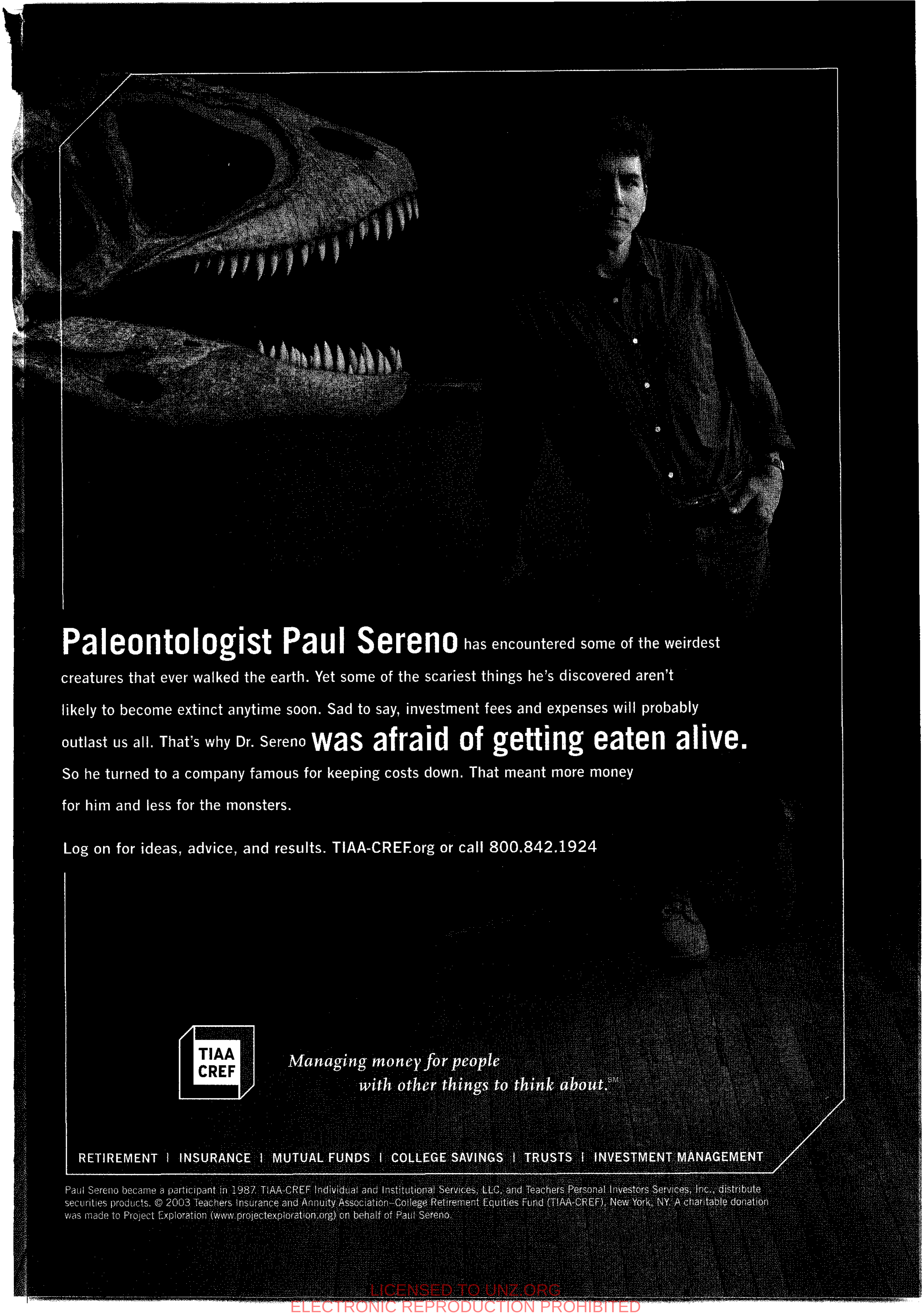
NYMPH ERRANT
Cole Porter's musical about a girl fresh out of boarding school who roves Europe looking for romance gets a revival at the Medicine Show Theatre. Directed by Barbara Vann. (549 W. 52nd St. 212-262-4216.)

POP NOTES

WHOLLY HOLY
In opera, the devil gets all the best tunes, but in **"Goodbye, Babylon,"** a six-CD boxed set that chronicles American gospel music from the first half of the twentieth century, God gets his share, too. Released by the minuscule Atlanta label Dust-to-Digital, "Goodbye, Babylon" is one of the most impressive collections of gospel recordings ever assembled. Its hundred and thirty-five songs touch on the gospel blues of artists like Blind Willie Johnson and the country gospel of artists like the Carter Family, on raucous string ensembles like the North Carolina Cooper Boys and clean-cut duos like the Blue Sky Boys, on celebrities like Mahalia Jackson and Hank Williams and unknowns like the Dinwiddie Colored Quartet and Stovepipe No. 1. White gospel, black gospel, smooth gospel, rough gospel, vocal gospel, instrumental gospel, Old Testament and New Testament gospel: it's all here, and with cleaned-up sound. The sixth disk is devoted to vintage sermons, including the Reverend J. M. Gates's scary oration "Death Might Be Your Santa Claus," recorded in 1926. (Rock fans can now fill in one more piece of trivia: the sermon, or one with a similar name, was evidently the inspiration for the pile-driving Mott the Hoople song of 1971.)

In the tradition of such boxed sets as Harry Smith's "Anthology of American Folk Music" and "Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues: The Worlds of Charley Patton," there's a wealth of annotation. The accompanying two-hundred-page book has informative capsule entries on each and every song, complete lyrics, longer scholarly essays (if you have ever wondered about the difference between shape-note gospel singing and Sacred Harp singing, wonder no more), and hundreds of illustrations and photographs, including reproductions of many of the original 78-r.p.m. record labels. And the whole thing comes packaged in a cedar box adorned with an illustration based on a Gustave Doré etching of the Tower of Babylon.

—Ben Greenman



Paleontologist Paul Sereno has encountered some of the weirdest creatures that ever walked the earth. Yet some of the scariest things he's discovered aren't likely to become extinct anytime soon. Sad to say, investment fees and expenses will probably outlast us all. That's why Dr. Sereno **was afraid of getting eaten alive.** So he turned to a company famous for keeping costs down. That meant more money for him and less for the monsters.

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Paul Sereno became a participant in 1987. TIAA-CREF Individual and Institutional Services, LLC, and Teachers Personal Investors Services, Inc., distribute securities products. © 2003 Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association–College Retirement Equities Fund (TIAA-CREF), New York, NY. A charitable donation was made to Project Exploration (www.projectexploration.org) on behalf of Paul Sereno.

"Golf: The Musical," a high-spirited revue for the cleated-shoe set, at the Houseman.

KATHY OSBORN

SUITCASE; OR, THOSE THAT RESEMBLE FLIES FROM A DISTANCE
Melissa James Gibson, author of the play "[sic]," brings a new work to the SoHo Rep, a comedy about two women who can't finish their dissertations and won't let their boyfriends into their apartments. Directed by Daniel Aukin. (46 Walker St. 212-868-4444.)

THESE VERY SERIOUS JOKES
The Target Margin company is back, with a new translation by Douglas Langworthy of the first part of Goethe's "Faust." The title, taken from Goethe's own description of his work, is particularly apt for this production, in which three guys in khakis and tinsel-fringed halos play the angels. Directed by David Herskovits. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444. Through Jan. 31.)

WOMEN ON FIRE
Judith Ivey plays eleven different characters in a one-woman show by Irene O'Garden. Directed by Mary B. Robinson. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200. Closes Feb. 8.)

WONDERFUL TOWN
The musical from 1953, about two spirited Ohio sisters' adventures in Greenwich Village, is a buoyant, beautifully staged revival that gives us back a thrilling glimpse of the gaiety, wit, confidence, and craft of the American musical in its populist heyday. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALSO PLAYING

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

THE BOY FROM OZ
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE
SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.

CAROLINE, OR CHANGE
Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Feb. 1.)

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

GOLDA'S BALCONY
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

GYPSY
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

I AM MY OWN WIFE
Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES
Theatre at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Pl. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

THE REGARD EVENING
Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. (Closes Feb. 1.)

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.

THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW
Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

TABOO
Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Feb. 8.)

THE THING ABOUT MEN
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The fourth week of the Balanchine centennial celebration is dominated by Peter Martins's dry, cold revision of "Swan Lake." (Here, the Swan Queen and her prince don't die and go to heaven. They just split up.) The company will also perform Susan Stroman's new Broadway/Hollywood-based "Double Feature" and some Balanchine ballets: "Apollo," "Serenade," "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2," and the happy, steppy "Donizetti Variations." ♦ Jan. 28-29 at 8, Jan. 31 at 2, and Feb. 1 at 3: "Swan Lake." ♦ Jan. 30 at 8 (an all-Balanchine program): "Donizetti Variations," "Apollo," and "Serenade." ♦ Jan. 31 at 8 (an all-Balanchine program): "Donizetti Variations," "Scotch Symphony," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ Feb. 3 at 7:30: "Double Feature." Through Feb. 29. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570.)

"DANCE ARRIBA!"
American Ballet Theatre and Casita Maria present an evening of dance featuring Angel Corella, Herman Cornejo, and other young A.B.T. principals and including a tango number performed by the children of Casita Maria. (Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St. For performance-only tickets, call 212-307-7171. For benefit tickets, call 212-477-3030, ext. 3239. Jan. 27 at 7:30.)

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE DANCE CO.
Jones kicked off his company's twentieth-anniversary celebration at the Kitchen last fall with a backward-looking engagement, but in the first week of his season at BAM, he introduces new work. In "Chaconne," a solo that reflects his recent concentration on musical form, he uses video images of himself to trace the voices in Bach's Partita in D Minor, shadowing his own steps in solitary duets and trios. Another new work, "Reading, Mercy, and the Artificial Nigger," shows his long-standing interest in experiments with text. As two narrators (including Susan Sarandon) read Flannery O'Connor's tale about a country boy who makes a trip to the city with his grandfather, the main roles pass between dancers like batons. Race, unsurprisingly, is the theme—it's one of Jones's favorites—but the only strident note here is the taboo word in the title. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 3 at 7:30. Through Feb. 7.)

NEW YORK FLAMENCO FESTIVAL 2004
The popular festival returns for its fourth year; see This Week. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Jan. 29-31 at 8 and Feb. 1 at 7. The festival runs through Feb. 27.)

MIGUEL GUTIERREZ AND THE POWERFUL PEOPLE
On New Year's Eve in 2001, the dancer Miguel Gutierrez, who recently won a Bessie for his work

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ACURA

with John Jasperse, blindfolded himself and wore earplugs for twenty-four hours. This experiment fuelled his new dance, "Damnation Road," an exploration of the interior landscape of terror, in which Michelle Boulé, blindfolded, moves among four other dancers to an ominous vocal and electronic score. Set by Christoph Draeger. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Jan. 27-31 at 8.)

BUGLISI/FOREMAN DANCE

Jacqulyn Buglisi and Donlin Foreman celebrate the tenth anniversary of their flourishing company with two lush, lengthy programs. In a world première by Buglisi, "Rain," Glen Velez plays assorted wind instruments over a recorded percussion score he created; live music also accompanies all of Foreman's dances, including two premières: "Cascade," in which dancers in flowing silk sweep across the space to a rendition of Chopin's "Polonaise-Fantaisie" played by Steven Ryan, and "Song," in which three pairs of dancers perform backbends and high lifts in front of twenty-seven members of the New York Choral Society. The group is known for its formality, based in Martha Graham technique, but both Buglisi and Foreman show a lighter touch this season; Buglisi tries out humor in the whimsical piece "Pollen in the Air," and Foreman's choreography for "Song" shows unusual ease of movement—something he ascribes to his Alabama roots. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Gala performance on Jan. 27 at 7. Performances continue Jan. 28-30 at 8, Jan. 31 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 1 at 2 and 7:30.)

DOUG VARONE AND DANCERS

The choreographer and his company perform a new romantic ensemble piece called "Castles," set to Prokofiev, along with reprises of last year's rich, folkloric epic "The Bottomland" and "Of the Earth Far Below," set to Steve Reich's swelling "Triple Quartet." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 3 at 8. Through Feb. 8.)

"THE ORCHID SHOW"

At the start of the Neta Dance Company's peculiar hybrid performance, whose structure imitates a television infotainment program, the host warns, "You can get off alcohol . . . but once you're hooked on orchids, you're finished—you'll never get off orchids, dear, never." The drug references continue in a lighthearted manner, as Jeremy Laverdure, wearing a blue wig and a dowdy dress and lip-synching to a prerecorded female voice, discourses on the strange allure of the hermaphroditic blooms. Neta Pulvermacher's show had its première at the Kitchen in 2000. This new staging includes one additional episode and is performed by five dancers, in costumes of vinyl and AstroTurf, who leap giddily across pastel lily pads, singing songs written by Pulvermacher and Tami Stronach. (The Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 30 at 9, Jan. 31 at 1 and 5, and Feb. 1 at 3. Through Feb. 22.)

DAVID PARKER AND THE BANG GROUP

Dance Theatre Workshop presents three works by the irreverent, cerebral company: "Slapstuck," a duet with Velcro; "Enough," a quartet set to Rachmaninoff; and "Cracked," Parker's fractured retelling of the "Nutcracker." "Cracked" uses a classical and jazz score, ironic costumes (by Melanie Rozema), and an array of dance styles—tap, boogie, modern, and pointe work—as it deconstructs the difference between "art dance" and social dance. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Jan. 28-31 at 7. Through Feb. 7.)

"ARE WE HERE YET?"

Kate Gyllenhaal and MoCo present three new works that explore the concept of home. The show is part of the Harkness Dance Center's "Sundays @ Three" series, in which performances are followed by Q. & A. sessions with choreographers. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 1 at 3.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

NEW YORK GUITAR FESTIVAL

Jan. 28 at 8: The experimental fretman **David Torn** shares a bill with the avant-garde guitarist **Andre La Fosse.** (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 212-601-1000.) Jan. 29 at 7: The **Choro Ensemble** explores the nineteenth-century urban Brazilian form that incorporates polkas, waltzes, mazurkas, and African rhythms. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8770.) Jan. 30 at 7: The Brazilian guitarist **Badi Assad.** (Joe's Pub.) Jan. 30-31 at 8: The adventurous downtown player **Marco Cappelli** and the Extreme Guitar Project. (Issue Project Room, 619 E. 6th St. 212-598-4130.) Jan. 31 at 7: Duos by **Vinicius Cantuária** and **Mark Ribot.** (Joe's Pub.) Feb. 3 at 8: The festival closes with a night of slide guitar featuring **Bob Brozman, Cindy Cashdollar, Daniel Lanois, Dave Tronzo,** and others. (Merkin Concert Hall, 167 W. 68th St. 212-501-3330.) (For more information, visit www.newyorkguitarfestival.org.)

"SINGERS OVER MANHATTAN"

The pioneering jazz vocalist **Sheila Jordan** (she recorded an unusual and rewarding version of "You Are My Sunshine" with George Russell in 1962) is accompanied by a trio that includes **Steve Kuhn,** a gifted post-bop pianist whose links with the singer stretch back some thirty years. His empathetic work enlivens Jordan's recent album "Little Song." The acclaimed British singer **Ian Shaw** rounds out the bill. (Kaplan Penthouse, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Jan. 29-31 at 8.)

THE NEW YORK POPS

Skitch Henderson and company present a night of classic swing tunes. The bill includes the **Diva Jazz Orchestra,** an all-female big band. Anchored by the drummer (and New York Pops percussionist) Sherrie Maricle, the Divas are a sleek, hard-hitting ensemble whose alumni include such topnotch players

"Louisiana, 1976," by Mitch Epstein, from the group show "Seventies Color Photography," at Kennedy Boesky.

as Ingrid Jensen and Claire Daly. The two groups will perform the Swiss composer Rolf Liebermann's rarely heard Concerto for Jazz Band and Symphony Orchestra, and the trumpeter **Gary Guthman** will pay tribute to the bandleader Harry James. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 30 at 8.)

"MUSIC AT THE THALIA"
Stew, a raconteur and singer from Los Angeles (his other band is a power-pop outfit called the Negro Problem), writes songs that echo Cole Porter, Burt Bacharach, and Randy Newman. His show here is part of the ongoing American Comic Vision Festival, and it's bound to be entertaining. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 30 at 8:30.)

JAZZ PIANO AT THE Y
Duke Ellington was an inventive, utterly distinctive pianist, on top of all his other musical gifts. The skilled pianists **Dick Hyman, Bill Charlap,** and **James Williams,** with additional support from the bassist **Jay Leonhart** and the trumpeter **Byron Stripling,** focus on the composer's keyboard prowess. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Jan. 31 at 8.)

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
It seems that every generation needs its very own Harry Connick, Jr. The twenty-year-old **Peter Cincotti** is a talented pianist and singer who couldn't be any more of a charmer onstage. (Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Feb. 2-3 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Jan. 30: **Hubert Sumlin,** whose sharp, scratchy guitar helped propel Howlin' Wolf's band for twenty years, is joined by the former Band drummer and vocalist **Levon Helm,** the singer **David Johansen,** and others. Feb. 1: The soulful vocals of **Bobby (Blue) Bland.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 28: The **Flatlanders** (see This Week). Jan. 29 and Jan. 31: The **Stills** have a sound that's unapologetically rooted in the eighties post-punk of the Smiths and Echo & the Bunnymen. The Canadian quartet is wrestling with such New York City bands as Interpol and the Rapture for dominance in the indie-rock revival. Evidence suggests that the Stills are holding their own—a second date was added, and both nights are sold out. Feb. 3-4: The German group the **Notwist,** a brash punk outfit in the late eighties, has slowly evolved into an innovative band. They craft ambitious, ambient post-rock that manages to be accessible pop; the simple lyrics of the front man, Markus Archer, are sung in English and delivered with an air of wonderment.

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Jan. 29: A celebration of "The French Antilles: We Will Play Love Tonight!" and "Louisiana: Catch That Train and Testify!," two new releases in the Alan Lomax collection, Rounder Records' ambitious series devoted to the field recordings of the pioneering ethnomusicologist. There will be an early set by **Dan Zanes** and a listening party. The Del Fuegos front man turned children's entertainer will perform sea chanteys (something that he's done before, on his album "Sea Songs"). Zanes will be joined by the singer-songwriter **Barbara Brousal** and by **David Jones,** one of England's foremost traditional singers. Mondays this month: The guitarist **Jim Campilongo** swims moodily through jazz, country, and blues like a back-room Bill Frisell.

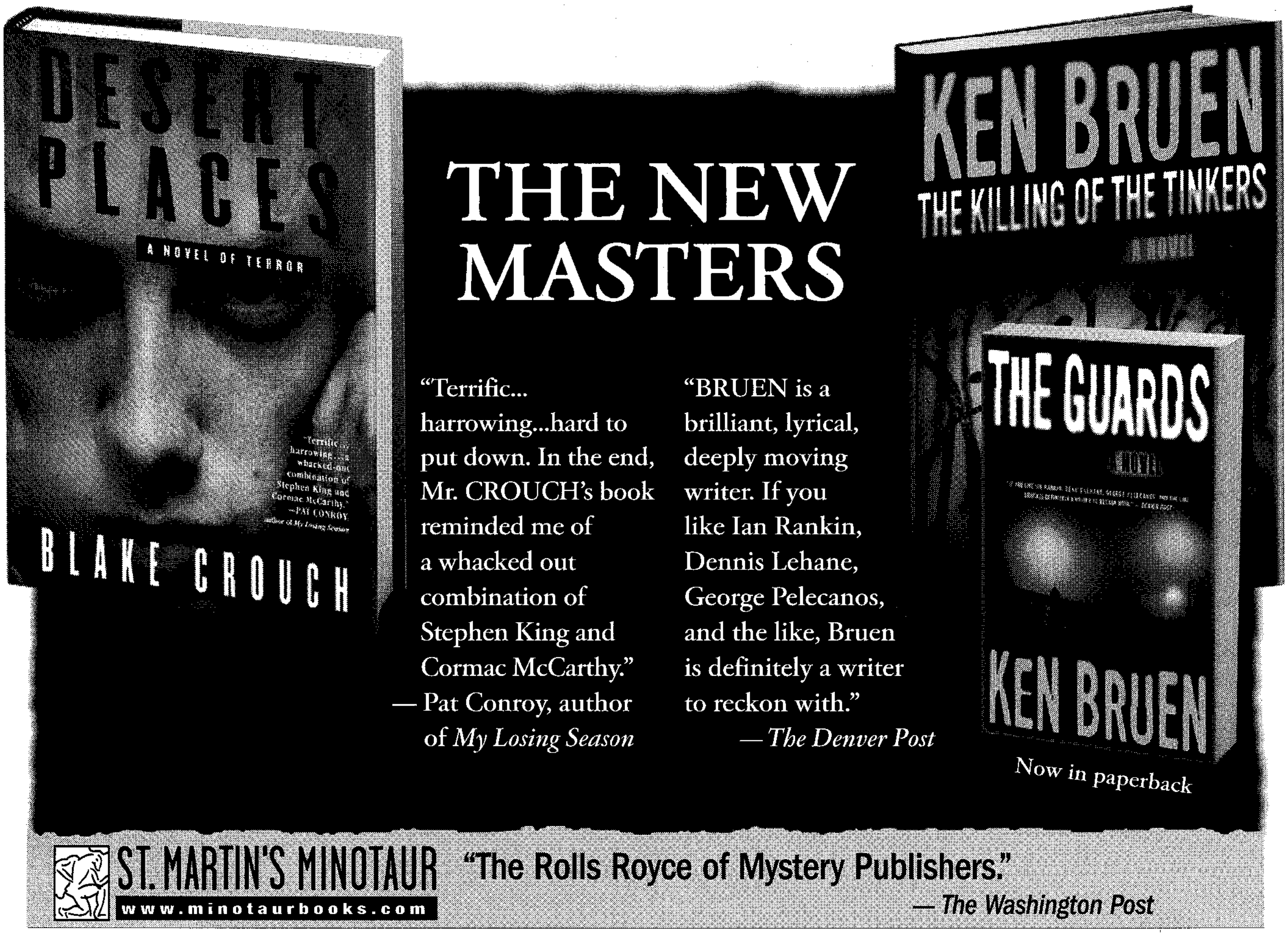
MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Jan. 30: The New York music scene is dominated by monochromatic post-punk sounds, but the **Everyothers** entertain a different sort of nostalgia—for glam-rock fabulousness.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Jan. 29: Jon Langford, the irrepressible Mekons front man, swings by with his New York City band, **Ship & Pilot,** featuring veterans of the Mekons and Pere Ubu as well as a violinist, Jean Cook, who Langford claims landed in the group after stalking another of his bands, the Pine Valley Cosmonauts. The group will be playing material from the Mekons' back catalogue along with songs from Langford's latest solo release, "All the Fame of Lofty Deeds." The silken-voiced **Sally Timms** will also be on hand. Feb. 1: The downtown aesthetes **Les Savy Fav** specialize in murky, guitar-based rock with angry-young-man leanings. With **Fred Armisen,** the onetime drummer for the Chicago experimental group Trenchmouth and a current cast member of "Saturday Night Live." Also performing is **Sam Jayne,** the ex-front man for the Seattle rock band Love as Laughter. After lying low for a while, Jayne has resurfaced in New York as a slightly ramshackle folksinger whose topics include the New Jersey Transit system.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Jan. 30: The Canadian duo known as **Death from Above** plays a frenzied blend of stripped-down rock, using synthesizers, bass, drums, and vocals. Its high-energy sound has all the subtlety of a ball-peen hammer to the teeth. Jan. 31: **Les Savy Fav** (see the Mercury Lounge).

SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—Jan. 30: The **Giraffes** are a willfully ridiculous hard-rock ensemble who traffic in bawdy guitar heroics and tongue-in-cheek prurience.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Jan. 29: **Yerba Buena** brings in its Cuban-inflamed funk.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SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Jan. 30: **April March** (née Elinor Blake), a Cleveland-based singer who has benefitted from her association with the producer (and part-time Air band member) Bertrand Burgalat, shares her love for French pop of the sixties.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Jan. 30: **Shelley Hirsch**, a true Brooklyn original, is an inspired vocal improviser who tells crazy, crowded stories about her youth in East New York—or about whatever else happens to strike her when she's performing. Tonight she'll be interpreting the film scores of Bernard Herrmann. With **Barbez**, a multilingual Eastern Europe-centric ensemble.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Jan. 27-31: **Kurt Elling**, a postmodern jazz vocalist whose prolix excursions can veer from spontaneous jazz babble to quotations from Rilke and Neruda. Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Jan. 28-31: The Chicago favorite **Patricia Barber** is a self-consciously literate jazz lady. Original songs from her 2002 album, "Verse," are littered with references to David Hockney, Baudelaire, and classical mythology. It's a good thing she also swings. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Feb. 1: A double bill with the **Heath Brothers** and the **Hank Jones** trio. Blood ties may account in part for the Heaths' uncommon cohesion, but the saxophonist Jimmy, the bassist Percy, and the drummer Albert are each titans of their respective instruments. An eighty-five-year-old veteran who once worked with Louis Armstrong and Joe Lovano, the pianist Jones still possesses a silken touch, impeccable taste, and sharp technique.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through Jan. 31, **Ute Lemper.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Starting Jan. 27: **Steve Tyrell** is a gruff-voiced entertainer who lives to make an audience feel good. It takes him only a few measures to clear the stuffiness from a tony room.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Feb. 1: Supporting a new album, "These Times," the fleet-fingered guitarist **Mike Stern** brings on the heavy artillery with a rhythm section including the electric-bass virtuoso **Richard Bona** and the drummer **Dave Weckl.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Jan. 29-Feb. 1: The premier trombonist **Steve Turre** gets his groove back with the band Funky T. Old-school players including **Lenny Pickett, Leon Pendarvis,** and **Omar Hakim** are on hand to keep the rhythm rolling. **Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra** takes over on Mondays.

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (212-864-6662)—Jan. 30-31: The **Joe Chambers** quartet. Many young mainstream jazz players imagine themselves as participants in classic Blue Note recording sessions, but the drummer Chambers has actually been there. A superbly sensitive percussionist who also plays piano and vibraphone when given the chance, Chambers is a living link to a glorious era, one that, to his credit, he looks beyond.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Feb. 1: The **Don Byron** quartet. The big news is that the clarinettist Byron has a guest pianist who can match his risk-taking bravado—**Jason Moran.** Add the veteran drummer **Billy Hart** and you've got a band guaranteed to take off. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The name Chuck Close instantly conjures images of giant gridded portraits, tight and deadpan in Photo-Realist black-and-white in the seventies, with more recent versions dissolving in loose lozenges of color. **"Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration"** shows that all the portraiture of self and others went along with constant experiments in the practice of printmaking. Etching, silk screen, linoleum and woodblock prints, and hand-constructed pulp-paper multiples are tracked through various proof states, and actual woodblocks, etched copper panels, and other studio paraphernalia also appear. The show is as much a primer in the printmaker's art as it is a retrospective of Close faces. Through April 18. ♦ **"Treasures of a Lost Art: Italian Manuscript Painting of the Middle Ages and Renaissance."** Through Feb. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—**"Kiki Smith: Prints, Books & Things"** shows off a compendium of the artist's favored images: eyes, breasts, birds, babies, cats, Little Red Riding Hood, and the starry sky. Although she's primarily a sculptor, this retrospective of works on paper and fabric makes it clear that her three-dimensional thinking is deeply influenced by the etchings, artist's books, and even Xeroxes collected here. The range of works is impressive, from Smith's first experiments with silk screen in the eighties to the beautiful "Blue Feet," a series of drypoints and etchings made last year, and they reveal a side of her that's quick, funny, luscious, and fragile. Through March 8. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—During the installation of **"Boccioni's Materia: A Futurist Masterpiece and the Avant-Garde in Milan and Paris,"** which opens Feb. 6, selections from the permanent collection are on view. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—The sparkling mid-career painting retrospective **"John Currin"** should be this season's major conversation piece. Topic: how have super-old-fashioned, alternately academic- and schlocky-looking figure paintings become the bee's knees in contemporary art? Currin's mostly imagined winsome nudes, pathetic males, society dames, gay couples, and, oh yes, women with breasts as big as the Ritz make everybody nervous in one way or another. They also display phenomenal degrees of skill and subtleties of expression. Once you start looking at Currin's stuff, it's all you can do to stop. Through Feb. 22. ♦ **"Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective of Drawings."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Unrepentant Ego: The Self-Portraits of Lucas Samaras."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-517-2742)—The Old Masters of the West used plaster church walls and altarpieces; Japanese artists opted for delicate, movable paper screens, but it would be heresy to describe the examples in **"Golden Fantasies: Japanese Screens from New York Collections"** as furniture. "Battles of Ichinotani and Yashima," from the early seventeenth century, is a sprawling, epic frieze set against a gold-leaf landscape with intricate vistas of the cavalry battles fought in the twelfth century, which produced Japan's first shogun. "Cherry-Blossom and Maple Viewing," from the mid-seventeenth century, is more peaceful, but no less opulent. Go early and come back: new screens will be installed on April 6. Through June 27. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

DAHESH MUSEUM
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—Charles Bargue and Jean-Léon Gérôme assembled the hundred and ninety-seven drawings that made up Bargue's "Cours de Dessin" in the late eighteen-sixties and early seventies, and Goupil printed them for years after, in a loose portfolio of lithographs. Bargue's pages of ears, eyes, mouths, and hands and drawings from classical sculpture and European painting were traced and copied by generations of students. Startlingly obedient sketches by Picasso and van Gogh (shown in reproduction) reveal Picasso to be a confident prodigy at twelve, van Gogh a struggling autodidact at twenty-eight. In **"Charles Bargue: The Art of Drawing,"** these sketches and the selections from the *cours* appear near Bargue's own painfully academic late paintings, which suggests that he may have been his own most dutiful pupil. Through Feb. 8. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

The German band the Notwist, at the Bowery Ballroom this week.

JOSE LUIS MERINO

MUSEUM FOR AFRICAN ART
36-01 43rd Ave., Long Island City (718-784-7700)—In **"Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora,"** African artists who have emigrated to Europe and the U.S. look back at homelands afflicted by war, economic hardship, colonialism, and slavery. Yinka Shonibare's headless mannequins, dressed in Western clothing made with African fabric, sit around a table, reënacting the 1884-85 Berlin conference to divide up Africa. The photographer Allan deSouza captures modern-day explorers looking for wildlife in his series "The Searchers." Wangechi Mutu's collages of grotesque, hybrid women are like fashion illustrations gone awry. The Algerian artist Zineb Sedira's tiles, installed on four walls, combine tiny photographs of female relatives with bilingual texts so minuscule that they become, from a short distance, abstract geometric patterns reminiscent of traditional Islamic ceramics. Through March 1. (Open Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays, 10 to 6, and weekends 10 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

HENRY DARGER
Darger (1892-1973) was a creature of excess. His fifteen-volume novel, discovered in his Chicago apartment as he lay dying, concerns a group of sisters called the Vivian girls. The work weighed in at 15,145 pages. A sequel filled another 8,500 or so, and his accompanying illustrations reached up to seventy feet. The two-sided watercolors here—mostly Vivian-girl related—are considerably smaller, but vividly drawn and detailed. Darger traced images from coloring books, comics, and newspapers, making him a precursor to Pop art, but the penises he drew on his young girl heroines take this work to a whole new place, which you can call sexually transgressive or just plain twisted. Through March 20. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 212-245-6734.)

CAMERON MARTIN
This Seattle artist remakes stock, iconic landscape images, from a mountain to a copse of trees, into spookily beautiful canvases, stark and stripped of detail and painted with muted industrial colors. Up close they almost look like paint-by-numbers sets with preordained outlines and slivers of flat color. A leafless tree set against a slightly contrasting black ground; waves and sky painted in shades of bronze; a green-and-beige whirlpool; a bruise-colored mountain (actually Mount Rainier, near the artist's home town). The titles—"Silence," "Update," "Extant," "Conflation"—are as terse and spring-loaded as the paintings themselves. Through Feb. 21. (Artemis Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave. 212-445-0444.)

"ENDLESS LOVE"
The love in "Endless Love" is not the kind you get in an old Brooke Shields movie but a romantic vision of the artist laboring in the studio. Since the emphasis is effort and the sort of transcendence that can come from it, it makes sense that the assembled works sort into two loose categories, craft-based processes (Lucky DeBellevue's pipe-cleaner sculptures, Xenobia Bailey's crocheted mandalas) and painterly abstraction (the cosmological cogitations of Alfred Jensen or James Siena). The impressively varied list of participants includes Giorgio Morandi, Thomas Nozkowski, Bruce Pearson, David Brody, James Esber, Alexi Worth, and many more. Through Feb. 7. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111.)

Short List

JOSEPH BEUYS
Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Feb. 14.

WILLIAM POPE.L
The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673. Through Feb. 8.

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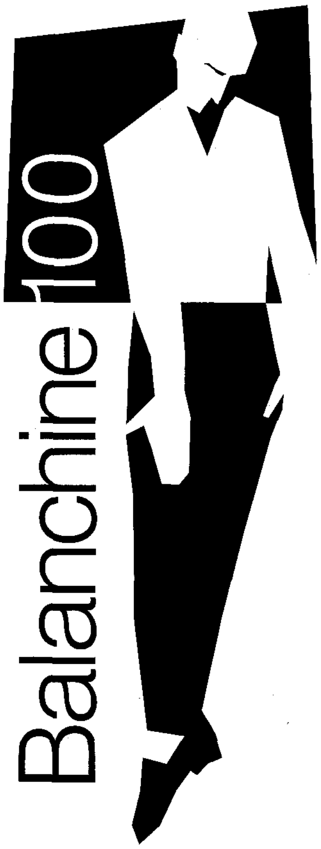

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TREVOR WINKFIELD / JOE BRAINARD
De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
212-262-5050. Through Feb. 7.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

OLAF BREUNING
A delirious two-screen video installation, housed in a wooden stockade, advances the thirty-three-year-old Swiss artist's vision of a world infested with media-bedizened, pseudo-tribal youth. (Imagine a halftime beer commercial populated by feral Euro-trash.) In the black-and-white video, a scraggly performance artist, Brian Kerstetter, babbles and cavorts in an over-the-top suite at the Madonna Inn in California. In the color one nearby, Kerstetter is seen acting up at Machu Picchu, the Grand Canyon, a resort in the Alps, and other tourist shrines. The work's tone verges on seriously crazy, but the over-all impression is one of explosive glee. Through Feb. 7. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

MATTHEW MC CASLIN
McCaslin's installation of flexible metal conduits snakes through the gallery, connecting one video monitor with another. It's a cyborg monstrosity with video screens where its orifices should be. The screens show peaceful images of lapping waves, dense star fields, or a flock of birds scattering across a cloudy sky; the contradiction is intentional. But the nature-culture contrast here doesn't jell; it's hardly news that clunky hardware overpowers the contemplative urge. Through Feb. 14. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500.)

JENNIFER STEINKAMP
Steinkamp would probably be the world's best digital-animation muralist even if her specialty weren't so, well, special. The Californian's architectural projections of flowing or jittery abstract patterns have been unfailingly gorgeous and august. Here she goes representational with four projected trees that appear to sprout from the floor. Their intricate branches, with leaves or without according to season, toss while turning, as if in high winds. The effect of each piece is a silent blizzard of line and color in virtual 3-D. The hectic spectacle is strangely restful—blitzing the optic nerve while courteously leaving other nerves alone. Through Feb. 14. (Lehmann-Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

NORBERT BISKY
Paintings by the son of a prominent East German politician look at history through a child's eyes. The murals of blue-eyed blond boys in scout uniforms testing their endurance and survival skills look like an Aryan "Lord of the Flies," or, more pointedly, like the Socialist pioneer groups that Bisky belonged to as a youngster, which were organized like the Hitler Youth. Piercing blue skies and matching eyes, blond heads, and lots of bare chest are pieced around wide swatches of blank space—places where the canvas was left unpainted, like portions of childhood experience that remain void. Through Feb. 7. (Koenig, 249 Centre St. 212-334-9255.)

JUDITH EISLER
The forty-one-year-old artist takes the video of a film like Sam Raimi's "Evil Dead," freeze-frames the tape, photographs the still, and then makes lush and brushy oil paintings from the photographs. The results—a pair of pouty lips, a necktie against a white shirtfront, glare from car chrome or window glass—have a quivering, pixellated familiarity. Eisler's palette of palpitating blacks, ice blues, and livid ochres makes a persuasive (and all too easy) case for the primacy of painting over film. Through Feb. 14. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 19th St. 212-206-8710.)

LEON GOLUB
Golub painted the angry and prescient "Graeco-Roman Colossi" between 1959 and 1964, looking back at McCarthyism and ahead to Vietnam. In the six enormous canvases, brooding, titanic figures loom from a mist of scrubbed and scumbled paint. His "Colossi" are both sufferers and persecutors, and the tone of the series is both elegiac and enraged. An equally complicated characterization holds sway in a series of erotic drawings from the last three years. Satyrs, centaurs, and temple prostitutes cavort in a harsh but exuberant frieze of classical allusions made personal by Golub's signature: a fleet, lithe, heavy hand. Through Feb. 7. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.)

ROBERT OLSEN
The show's title, "re:moving," is precious, but the feeling of absence and loneliness in the nine diminutive panels is palpable. Olsen paints from his own photographs of public spaces devoid of people. The nocturnal blue-green-gray palette heightens the mystery of unassuming locales such as a tram interior or the doors and stairways into a machine room. "Untitled (Elevator Interior)" celebrates the lustre of an elevator's stainless-steel walls, just as Vermeer would celebrate that of a pearl or a chandelier. Three dark, clever panels depart from the architecture and industrial motifs and show people lifting their clothing to reveal tattoos, but in a painted slight of hand the tattoos have been, well, re:moved. Through Feb. 8. (Plane Space, 102 Charles St. 917-606-1268.)

"SPRAWL"
The nine artists and artist groups in this show rely on materials like scavenged carpet swatches, cardboard, and the pocked cement walls of the gallery's industrial exhibition space. The best pieces take structures loosely associated with suburbia and make them sprawl in sculptural space—a wildly low-tech racetrack for some impossibly rickety Matchbox cars, by Jimbo Blachly, and a stadium scoreboard, by Chris Hanson and Hendrika Sonnenberg, that's made of insulation foam that lies collapsed on the floor, as if it had just fallen from the ceiling. Through Feb. 8. (Hudson Clearing, 250 Hudson St. 646-269-8559.)

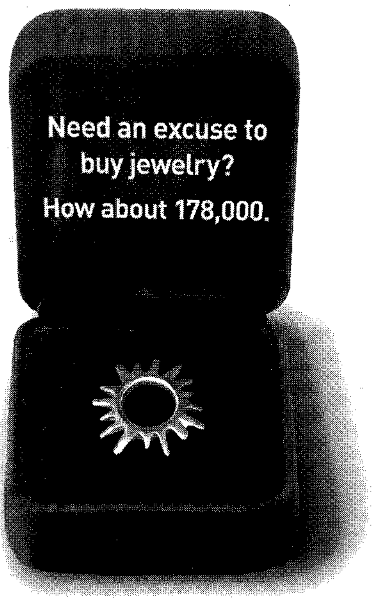
Short List

MARION LESAGE
Broome St. Gallery, 498 Broome St.
212-226-6085. Through Feb. 15.

PHOTOGRAPHY

PHILIP KWAME APAGYA
The first U.S. show for this Ghanaian photographer starts where other Africans, like Malick Sidibe and Sedou Keita, have trod before, but Apagya adds exuberant color to the mix. His subjects stand before painted backdrops—of offices, airport tarmacs, or living rooms decked with the latest electronics—and wave or give a thumbs-up to the camera. Apagya's photographs depict a vibrant urban place where women wash their children in private bathrooms and everyone has food in the refrigerator. Through Feb. 7. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701.)

DIANE ARBUS
This show has three galleries' worth of Arbus's work, which is rare enough, but it also offers an unprecedented chance to see previously squirrelled-away contact sheets and an unpublished portfolio of photographs of an Upper East Side family, the Mattheis, taken over two days in 1969. Few of the pictures of the family are truly interesting, but the ones that do leap from the contact sheets—a couple of portraits of the oldest daughter, staring at the camera through poker-straight hair, and the younger daughter, leaning against a couch, her free hand and foot ready to slam a nearby door—rival Arbus's best. To meet expectations that might arise from the show's title, "Family Albums," and its attendant catalogue, the curators have included other portraits, including one of a kohl-eyed Jayne Mansfield and her fresh-faced daughter, another of the bookish Jane Jacobs and her bookish son, and some pretty boring shots of Ozzie and Harriet Nelson. Through March 27. (Grey, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6782.)



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TABLES FOR TWO

BONGO

299 Tenth Ave. (212-947-3654)—Lobster rolls, unlike bagels and burgers, do not inspire great debate, so it's only a little reckless to suggest that the best in town can be found at this sleek Chelsea storefront, next door to a taxi stand and a City Gas station on a forlorn stretch of Tenth Avenue. Bongo is not a fish shack or an oyster bar but, by its own account, a "seafood lounge." The intimation of laxity is misleading, because this is a vigilant operation, expert in the delivery of top-shelf booze and briny protein. By "lounge," the owners, Andrea Cohen and Jeffrey Bell, who opened Bongo five years ago (the space had belonged to an exterminator), mean the décor and the low-slung furniture, all assiduously mid-century modern (Eames shell chairs, George Nelson bubble lights, Florence Knoll sofas, a lot of blue and green blown glass). The place would seem precious if it weren't so easygoing. Often you end up sharing a table or even a platter of shrimp with strangers.

Cohen, the voluble one, and Bell, the shy one, do all the work. They make the Martinis, as well as an array of custom cocktails (the Bongo Snowball, the Bongo Gin Ricky) that are large and agreeably lethal. Bell and Cohen will mix you a "mini" if one is not enough and two is too much. They man the galley, too. They chop up the coleslaw and shuck the oysters—tiny Olympias, fat Caraquets, handsome Pemaquids—and prepare the tidy platters of smoked fish or littleneck clams or sevruga caviar. Best of all, they crack the meat out of dozens of lobsters, mixing in scallions, shallots, mayo, and, of course, a secret seasoning before lumping gobs of the stuff into hot buttered buns. If lobster rolls were as cheap as hot dogs, humans would eat nothing else.

One grand extravagance at Bongo is the lobster-roll party platter—a big bowl of slaw surrounded by a ring of twelve half-sized rolls, all for sixty-five bucks. You tend to keep count of who at your table has had how many; it is advisable to dine here in even-numbered groups to discourage difficult math or excessive displays of gluttony or politeness in the apportioning of shared food. As for dessert, even greedy eaters don't fight over vodka oyster shooters. Have as many as you need. (Open for dinner, Mondays through Saturdays. Entrées $10.50-$19.50.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

WILLIAM EGGLESTON

Many of the black-and-white pictures in this show, taken between 1960 and 1974 by the artist most responsible for the introduction of color images to galleries and museums, have never been exhibited before, and they provide a road map for Eggleston's later supersaturated color work. There are off-handedly intimate portraits of teen-agers in parking lots and on street corners, but the bare bedrooms, lonely country highways, and nearly empty diners speak most eloquently of Eggleston's gift for making insignificant places important. Through Feb. 21. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

GRACIELA ITURBIDE

Iturbide, who learned about photographic surrealism from a master, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, is best known for her intimate pictures of people. This show collects fourteen photographs of birds, made in Louisiana, England, India, and Iturbide's native Mexico. The birds are both solitary, melancholy symbols and part of an unfathomable avian world. A bull rustles pigeons in a Mexican courtyard, a leather-skinned man is circled by vultures, a thick cloud of smaller birds darkens the sky around a cross. Through Feb. 7. (Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

JOEL STERNFELD

There are two groups of pictures in this show: passersby caught on the street in 1976—in cars, hurrying, staring—and later landscapes, magisterial and ironic evocations of an unsettled America. The earlier pictures haven't been shown since an exhibit in 1980, and the landscapes have now been printed several times larger than before. Details that wouldn't have come to the fore in smaller prints—the curled toes of a stoned-looking kid sitting on a car hood, the legs twisted under the body of the "Exhausted Renegade Elephant"—make one look anew at these classic images. Through Feb. 7. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

Short List

EDWARD BURTYNSKY
Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999. Through Jan. 31.
LORETTA LUX
Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 212-414-0370. Through March 6.
"SEVENTIES COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY"
Kennedy Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-741-0963. Through Jan. 31.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SWANN

Jan. 29 at 10:30 A.M.: The smart little house brings up the rear in this month's Old Masters binge in classic Swann style, with a single major work—a chalk study of a blithely Rubenesque St. Cecilia by Watteau, expected to bring up to sixty thousand dollars—highlighting a large and more affordable selection of drawings from the French, Dutch, English, German, and Italian schools. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

The inspired conducting of Plácido Domingo, who enjoys many roles these days (tenor, arts administrator, restaurateur), makes Giancarlo del Monaco's otherwise static production of **"Madama Butterfly"** cook. The maestro's seductive brand of leadership compensates for any technical limitations, and he shapes Puccini's clichés into rubatos that are by turns balletic and arresting. He is aided by the honest nobility of Veronica Villarroel's Butterfly, the Italianate swagger of Marco Berti's Pinkerton (an impressive début), and Jane Bunnell's earthy Suzuki. (Cynthia Lawrence replaces Villarroel in the week's first performance.) (Jan. 28 at 7:30 and Jan. 31 at 8.) ♦ **"Rigoletto,"** with Andrea Rost, Frank Lopardo, and Juan Pons; Marco Armiliato conducts. (Jan. 29 at 8.) ♦ Ines Salazar takes the title role in a revival of **"Tosca,"** which also features Franco Farina and Samuel Ramey; John Fiore. (Jan. 30 and Feb. 2 at 8.) ♦ Semyon Bychkov continues his début performances at the Met, conducting a revival of August Everding's production of **"Boris Godunov,"** staged by David Kneuss; the cast features James Morris (in the title role), Irina Mishura, Sergej Larin, David Kuebler, Sergei Leiferkus, and Vladimir Matorin. (Jan. 31 at 1 and Feb. 3 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Riccardo Muti and Thomas Quasthoff are a study in contrasts—the conductor's commanding poise borders on the aloof, while the bass-baritone's performances glow with warmth. They share the stage for a hearty German program of Schubert (the "Rosamunde" Overture), Brahms (the Symphony No. 2 in D Major), and Mozart (several

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concert arias for bass, performed by the Philharmonic for the first time). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Jan. 28-29 at 7:30 and Jan. 30-31 at 8.)

EOS ORCHESTRA: "UNFINISHED/REFINISHED"
Jonathan Sheffer, Eos's founder, finds a link between Schubert's early-Romantic style and the eclectic lyricism of today's compositional trends. He conducts a program bookended by Schubert's Symphony No. 8 ("Unfinished") and Berio's "Rendering" (a realization of Schubert's sketches for the un-begun Tenth Symphony); in between come orchestrations of Schubert songs by Offenbach, Reger, Sheffer, and Berlioz, performed by the soprano Arianna Zukerman (in a semi-staging by Peter Kazaras), along with an account of Berio's jaunty "Sequenza V" by the trombonist David Taylor. (Ethical Culture Society Concert Hall, 2 W. 64th St. 212-691-6415. Jan. 29 at 8.)

VOICES OF ASCENSION: "BEYOND CHANT"
Dennis Keene's superb professional choir performs all of the selections on its best-selling 1994 Delos recording of Renaissance works (including music by Palestrina, Byrd, Tallis, and others). (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 212-358-1469. Jan. 29 at 8.)

JUILLIARD "FOCUS!" FESTIVAL: "ALL ABOUT IVES"
Joel Sachs devotes his annual new-music festival to Charles Ives's affecting and unruly art on the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death. For the grand finale, Anne Manson and Judith Clurman conduct the Juilliard Orchestra and Choral Union in "Psalm 90," "The Unanswered Question," the audaciously difficult Symphony No. 4, and—while they're at it—the first New York performances of the "Emerson Overture" (with Lang-Ning Liu), a concerto for piano and orchestra recently reconstructed by the Ives scholar David G. Porter. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Jan. 30 at 8. For free tickets, which are required for the orchestral concert, call 212-769-7406. For a full schedule of Ives recitals, see www.juilliard.edu.)

RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Bartók's lyrical Piano Concerto No. 3 (with Hélène Grimaud) is an island of serenity in Alexander Vedernikov's program of Shostakovich blockbusters (which begins with the "Festive Overture" and ends with the Fifth Symphony). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 3 at 8.)

RECITALS

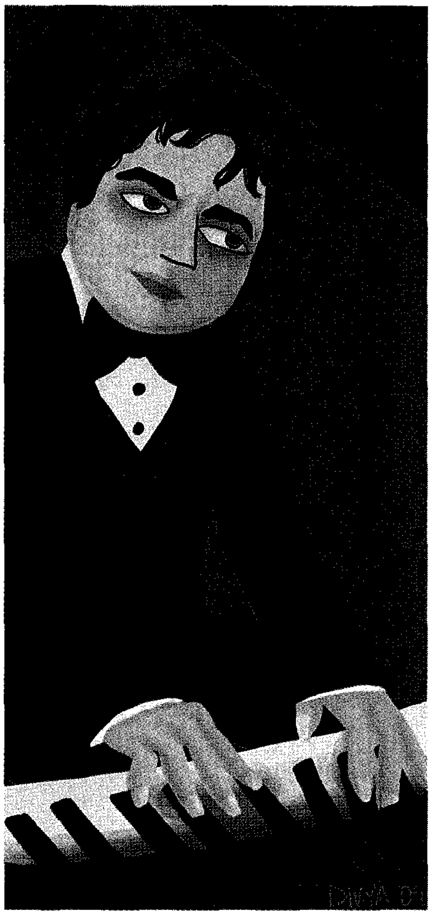
"THE SONG CONTINUES"
A master class by the soprano Deborah Voigt leads off the inaugural season of Marilyn Horne's vocal festival at Carnegie Hall (featuring eight events at the hall's three stages), which also includes master classes by Horne and by the baritone Thomas Hampson, two mini-recitals by young singers, and a seminar on the state of the song recital moderated by the pianist Brian Zeger. (Zankel Hall. Jan. 28 at 3.) ♦ Carnegie Hall and the Marilyn Horne Foundation honor the mezzo-soprano on her seventieth birthday with a gala concert featuring, among others, the mezzo-sopranos Stephanie Blythe and Olga Borodina, the tenor Ben Heppner, and the countertenor David Daniels. (Isaac Stern Auditorium. Feb. 1 at 2.) (212-247-7800. For a complete listing of events, see www.carnegiehall.org.)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS
The renowned ensemble offers "Da Capo International," a program drawing on their recent tours that includes the premières of works by the Russian composer Kirill Umansky and the Cambodian-American composer Chinary Ung along with music by Gubaidulina ("Rejoice!") and Berio. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 28 at 8.)

RUTH LAREDO AND NATHANIEL ROSEN
The pianist, closing her sixteenth season of "Concerts with Commentary," joins her cellist friend for an evening of sonatas and variations by Beethoven (including the two Cello Sonatas, Op. 102). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 29 at 7.)

BARGEMUSIC
Colin Carr plays Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello. Jan. 29 and Jan. 31 at 7:30: Nos. 1, 3, and 5. ♦ Jan. 30 at 7:30 and Feb. 1 at 4: Nos. 2, 4, and 6. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG
Steven Blier, the group's artistic director and chief raconteur, accompanies Jennifer Aylmer and Hugh Russell in art songs, folk-song arrangements, and theatre music by composers born or educated in Barcelona, a hot spot for European culture in the first half of the last century. Beginning with Granados's "Cançó d'Amor," the evening proceeds through music by Albéniz, Mompou, and Montsalvage, closing with a duet from Vives's zarzuela "La Villana." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 29 at 8.)



The Russian pianist Arcadi Volodos performs at Carnegie Hall on Jan. 31.

ARTEK: "BATTAGLIA D'AMORE"
The harpsichordist Gwendolyn Toth's little band of singers and players offers a slate of music by Monteverdi (the searing "Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda"), Cesti, Marina, and others, all based on Torquato Tasso's poetic masterpiece "Gerusalemme Liberata." (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-967-9157. Jan. 30 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "SOUND INVESTMENT"
The Society concludes its thirty-fifth-anniversary celebration of commissioned works. Jan. 30 at 8: Barber's Three Songs, Op. 45 (commissioned for Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and sung here by William Sharp), lead off a mostly conservative program of excerpts from works by Bernstein, Menotti, Schuman, and Mackey, among others; the performers include the harpist Nancy Allen, the clarinettist David Shifrin, and the Borromeo String Quartet. ♦ Feb. 1 at 5: The final program features complete performances of works by Boulez, Carter (the Quintet for Piano and Strings), and Harbison along with movements by Schuller, Bolcom, Wuorinen, and Wynton Marsalis (an excerpt from "At the Octoroon Balls," for string quartet). The players include the pianist Ursula Oppens and the Brentano, Miami, and Orion String Quartets. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

ENSEMBLE SOSPESO / ARDITTI QUARTET
The excellent young new-music ensemble celebrates Elliott Carter's ninety-fifth birthday with the matchless Arditti Quartet from London, offering Carter's Fifth String Quartet and Oboe Quartet along with music by Boulez, Finnissy, Wolff, and others. (Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk St. 212-926-0759. Jan. 30 at 8.)

"THE EXTREME GUITAR PROJECT"
One of the spicier concerts of the freewheeling New York Guitar Festival should come from Marco Cappelli, who has commissioned ten works from composers who share his liking for rigorously structured pieces and extreme techniques. They include Elliott Sharp, Nick Didkovsky, David Shea, and Annie Gosfield. (Issue Project Room, 619 E. 6th St. 212-598-4130. Jan. 30-31 at 8.)

OPUS ONE
Three stars from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (including the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott) and one from the Guarneri Quartet (the cellist Peter Wiley) play hooky in the affordably priced "Peoples' Symphony" series, offering music by Dvořák (including the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major) and Martinů. (Washington Irving High School, 16th St. at Irving Pl. 212-586-4680. Jan. 31 at 8.)

ARCADI VOLODOS
Those needing a break from the showmanship of Lang Lang can check out this young Russian virtuoso, a more thoughtful sort of artist, who plays a program of piano works by Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, and Liszt at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. Jan. 31 at 8.)

ANGELIKA KIRCHSCHLAGER
The radiant mezzo-soprano offers an afternoon of lieder by Schubert and Wolf. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Feb. 1 at 2.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"UNRAVELING GATHERING"
Two years ago the artist Sabrina Gschwandtner started *KnitKnit*, a limited-edition journal devoted to the textile arts (the first issue included an article on spinning wool from an Angora rabbit; the last one was devoted to such D.I.Y. projects as how to knit an iPod cozy). On Jan. 31 at 5, Gschwandtner celebrates the publication of *KnitKnit's* third issue with an evening called the "Unraveling Gathering." It features readings, a screening of Michelle Smith's film "Like All Bad Men He Looks Attractive" (stitched together from film footage, plastic, and translucent material), the display of such objects as a knitted sweater the size of a penny, and a hands-on button-making and print-design workshop by the Church of Craft founder Callie Janoff. (Printed Matter, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-925-0325.)

READINGS
Jan. 28 at 8: "Selected Shorts" continues with "Three Funny Friends." Stories by Thomas Beller, Meghan Daum, and David Schickler will be read by the actors Jane Curtin, Barbara Garrick, and Stephen Lang. The writers will also be on hand to discuss their work. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.) ♦ Jan. 29 at 5:30: Ha Jin offers passages from his new novel, "The Crazed." (Low Memorial Library, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-4768.) ♦ Jan. 29 at 7:30: Colin Harrison reads from his new novel, "The Havana Room." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
Jan. 30 at 7:30: "Iraq and Beyond," a debate with the journalists Christopher Hitchens, Mark Danner, Samantha Power, and David Frum. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 212-229-5611.) ♦ Jan. 28 at 8: Ken Auletta, a writer for this magazine, joins Tina Brown for a talk called "The Business of News." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

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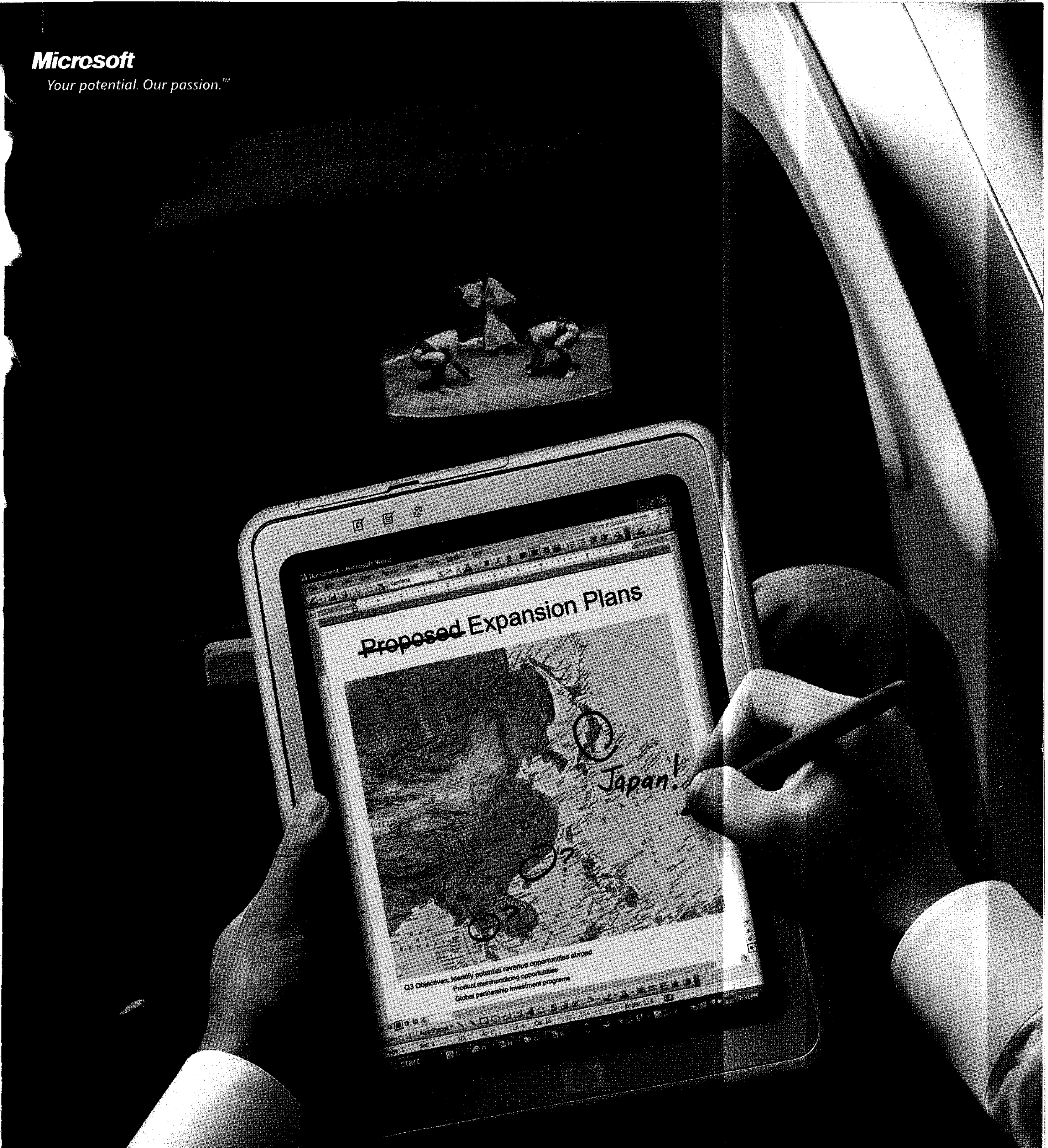
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MOVIES OPENING

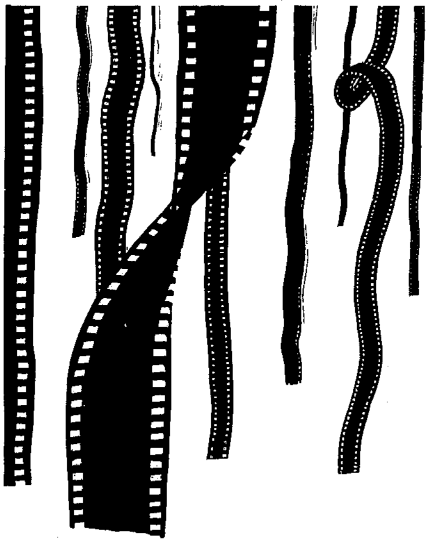
ABOUNA
A drama about two brothers in a small village in Chad who are sent away to a strict Koranic school. Directed by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun. In French. Opening Jan. 30. (Quad Cinema.)

THE BIG BOUNCE
An adaptation of Elmore Leonard's crime novel, in which a drifter con man (Owen Wilson) gets mixed up with a Hawaiian real-estate tycoon (Gary Sinise). Also with Morgan Freeman, Sara Foster, and Charlie Sheen. Directed by George Armitage. Opening Jan. 30.

ON THE RUN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 30. (Angelika Film Center.)

THE PERFECT SCORE
Scarlett Johansson and Erika Christensen play two members of a group of high-school students who attempt to steal an advance copy of the S.A.T. Directed by Brian Robbins. Opening Jan. 30.

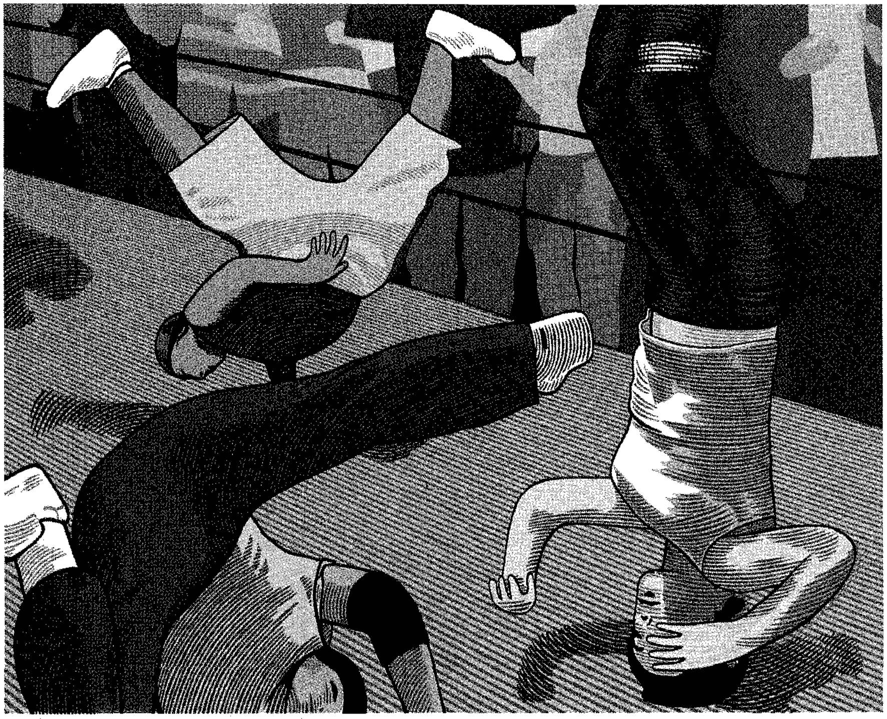
YOU GOT SERVED
A drama set in the world of competitive street dancing. The cast includes Lil' Fizz, Jennifer Freeman, Raz B, Steve Harvey, and La La Vasquez. Opening Jan. 30.



FILM NOTES

AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER
Unhappy people in documentaries often come off as affectless, distant, and without focus. Aileen Wuornos, the Florida prostitute and murderer who was executed in 2002, is just the opposite. In Nick Broomfield's film, much of it shot just weeks before the execution, Wuornos is overfocussed: her eyes pop out of her head, and, even though she's shackled to a chair, every part of her body is wired and moving. She pulls down her mouth and tosses her hair, assaulting the camera with her sledgehammer ego, her suffering, her brutality, and her belief in her own honesty. You can't dismiss her as a psychotic—she may, in fact, be clinically insane—because she also has patches of lucidity and power, and she's unnerving as hell. Broomfield caught Wuornos in high redemption mode: "I cannot go into that chamber as a liar," she says. "I have to clear my conscience and leave my spirit in the name of Jesus Christ." Broomfield wonders: is she coming clean, or is she suffering from death-row fatigue—the desire to get it over with?—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/26/04.) (Sunshine Cinema.)

ALONG CAME POLLY
Even by the standards of romantic comedy, the pairing of Ben Stiller and Jennifer Aniston feels like the product of an artificial intelligence. Stiller, employing his paranoid persona, plays a risk analyzer who sees E. coli in a bowl of bar nuts. Aniston, in a cautious performance, is a catering employee with commitment problems; we know she's a free spirit because she wears knit hats. Yet, despite the absence of chemistry, the two stars occasionally connect for a good gag, and the writer-director John Hamburg sets up some very funny moments, especially for the naturally squeamish. Hank Azaria, last seen as the editor Michael Kelly in "Shattered Glass," is unrecognizable as a nudist French scuba instructor, and Philip Seymour Hoffman does a hilarious bit as a basketball spaz.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)



Opening January 30, the street-dancing drama "You Got Served."

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

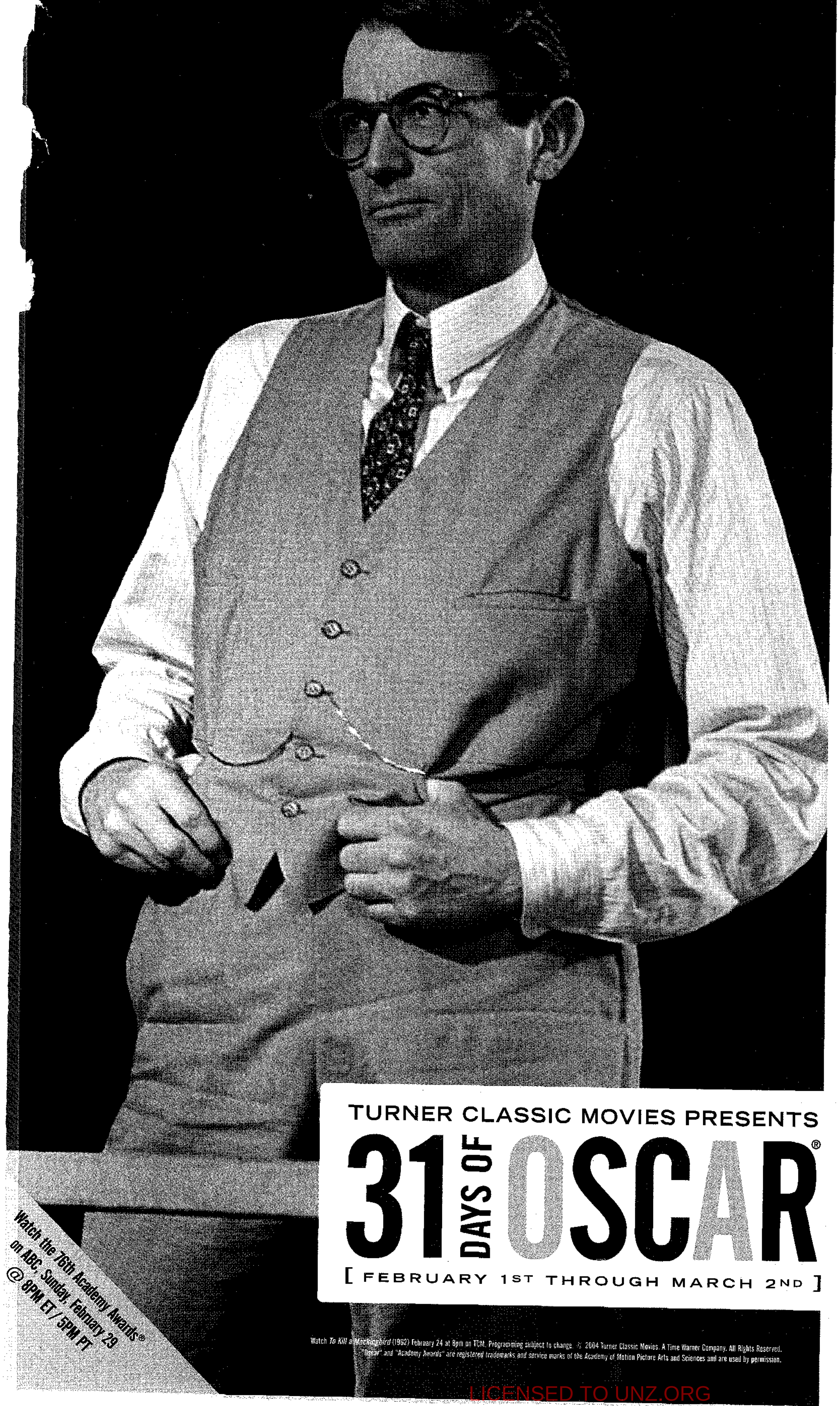
BIG FISH
The title is apt enough; this movie is long, wet, and wriggling, and, after a while, you may want to hold your nose. It tells the story of Edward Bloom, played in his youth by Ewan McGregor and in the final act of his life by Albert Finney. That life is a picaresque, crammed with exaggeration and casual magic—a witch with a glass eye that shows forthcoming deaths, say, or a pair of spangled night-club singers who are also Siamese twins. This is easy stuff for somebody of the director Tim Burton's gifts, and you seldom feel that the new picture tests him or turns him on in the way that "Beetlejuice" or "Edward Scissorhands" did. The result is his most emotionally reactionary work to date. With Billy Crudup as Bloom's poor stooge of a son, Danny DeVito as a circus ringmaster, Matthew McGrory as a moping giant, and Jessica Lange and Alison Lohman, both badly underused, as the older and younger versions of the hero's only love.—*Anthony Lane* (12/15/03) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

UN CHIEN ANDALOU
Luis Buñuel's sixteen-minute début, from 1929, is one of the most influential movies ever made. Buñuel wrote that when he and Salvador Dali spent a week cooking up the scenario for the perverse short, "We had to open all doors to the irrational and keep only those images that surprised us, without trying to explain why." No matter how often you watch it or how rigorously you analyze its grotesqueries, those images retain their disquieting absurdity. The most famous scene—a man watching a cloud slice across the moon before he uses his razor to slice open a woman's eyeball—is just the prelude. From a hand crawling with insects to a severed hand being nudged about in the street, the movie boasts an oft-raided treasure trove of horrifying motifs. It still has a queasy erotic undertow all its own, especially when a man about to pounce on his lust object is next seen pulling ropes that are dragging, among other things, two Marist priests and a dead donkey rotting in a grand piano.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Jan. 30-Feb. 2.)

COLD MOUNTAIN
A heroic attempt to capture, in all its tangled bitterness, the backwash of war—the lawless, scrappy life that takes shape behind the lines in an atmosphere of uneasy freedom. Inman (Jude Law), a young Confederate soldier, badly wounded and spiritually depleted, deserts his company and tries to make his way back to his home town in North Carolina and to a young woman, Ada (Nicole Kidman), he knew briefly and fell in love with. Along the way, he has a series of grotesque, terrifying adventures. Ada, meanwhile, aided by an arrogant interloper (Renée Zellweger) with a strong back, learns to run the farm that her late father left to her. The coming together of the two lovers has a satisfying kind of inevitability, like the halves of a drawbridge falling into place. Anthony Minghella adapted Charles Frazier's acclaimed 1997 novel, and directed in a style both high flown and filthy with the mire and blood of war. The extraordinary cast includes Donald Sutherland, Eileen Atkins, Brendan Gleeson, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Giovanni Ribisi.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Cinema 2, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE COOLER
This tough and sentimental genre film feels like a B movie from 1956 with a dirty mouth. Bernie Lootz (William H. Macy) has such terrible luck that a Vegas casino owner named Shelly (Alec Baldwin) uses him as a "cooler": no sooner does Bernie join a crap game than anyone with a hot hand immediately begins to lose. But then Bernie falls in love with a young cocktail waitress, Natalie (Maria Bello), and his magic suddenly shifts: now everyone around him wins, which is big trouble for Bernie. The writer-director Wayne Kramer keeps the color scheme of this Runyonesque fable harsh and bright—the night tones of Vegas, seen from its

TRIAL WITHOUT ERROR.



FEBRUARY 2004

PRIMETIME HIGHLIGHTS - ALL TIMES EASTERN

1 SUN BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY NOMINEES & WINNERS
8:00PM Close Encounters of the Third Kind ('77)
10:30PM She Wore a Yellow Ribbon ('49)
12:15AM Stagecoach ('39)

2 MON BEST ACTRESS NOMINEES
8:00PM Duel in the Sun ('46)
10:30PM The Nun's Story ('59)
1:15AM Wait Until Dark ('67)

3 TUE BEST ACTOR NOMINEES
8:00PM Cool Hand Luke ('67)
10:15PM Absence of Malice ('81)
12:15AM Good Morning, Vietnam ('87)

4 WED BEST SONG NOMINEES & WINNERS
8:00PM Top Hat ('35)
10:00PM The Man Who Knew Too Much ('56)
12:15AM The Way We Were ('73)

5 THU BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY NOMINEES & WINNERS
8:00PM Some Like It Hot ('59)
10:30PM Sense and Sensibility ('95)
1:00AM Little Women ('33)

6 FRI BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY NOMINEES & WINNERS
8:00PM Sleepless in Seattle ('93)
10:00PM Splash ('84)
12:00AM Operation Petticoat ('59)

7 SAT BEST PICTURE NOMINEES
8:00PM Battleground ('49)
10:15PM The Right Stuff ('83)
1:30AM Deliverance ('72)

8 SUN BEST EDITING NOMINEES & WINNERS
8:00PM The Day of the Jackal ('73)
10:30PM Blazing Saddles ('74)
12:15AM Smokey and the Bandit ('77)

9 MON BEST ACTRESS NOMINEES
8:00PM The African Queen ('51)
10:00PM Private Benjamin ('80)
12:00AM Victor/Victoria ('82)

10 TUE BEST ACTOR NOMINEES
8:00PM Sands of Iwo Jima ('49)
10:00PM Mr. Deeds Goes to Town ('36)
12:00AM Dead Poets Society ('89)

11 WED BEST ART DIRECTION NOMINEES & WINNERS
8:00PM The Shootist ('76)
10:00PM The Greatest Story Ever Told ('65)
1:30AM Beaches ('88)

12 THU BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS NOMINEES
8:00PM Parenthood ('89)
10:00PM Hondo ('53)
11:30PM Singin' in the Rain ('52)

13 FRI BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS WINNERS
8:00PM Harvey ('50)
10:00PM Bonnie and Clyde ('67)
12:00AM National Velvet ('44)

14 SAT BEST PICTURE NOMINEES
8:00PM Tootsie ('82)
10:00PM As Good As It Gets ('97)
12:30AM The Goodbye Girl ('77)

15 SUN BEST SOUND NOMINEES & WINNERS
8:00PM Rear Window ('54)
10:00PM They Were Expendable ('45)
12:30AM WarGames ('83)

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underside. The movie is set in sordid casinos and the kind of green-walled motel room in which fornication takes place in the adjoining room at a colossal volume. The crud and the petty desperation of "The Cooler" are immensely enjoyable as atmosphere, and the actors attack their roles with relish.—*D.D.* (1/12/04) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

CRIMSON GOLD

Jafar Panahi, the Iranian director who made "The White Balloon" and "The Circle," addresses a subject that has, until now, received scandalously little attention: the life of a pizza deliveryman. Hussein (Hussein Emadeddin) is as doughy a figure as his profession would suggest; he waddles through Tehran, or glides with unhurried dignity on his scooter. What he observes on his rounds could have amounted to a mere ragbag of details—a Westernized playboy with a swimming pool in his apartment, cops staking out a loud party—yet it comes across as the portrait of a city both humming with human traffic and quietly besieged by the state. The hero's own story has the luckless tinge that we associate with Turgenev or Maupassant: the pinch of frustration, plus the wrong move that lunges into calamity. In Farsi.—*A.L.* (1/19/04) (Quad Cinema.)

DAY OF WRATH

It has been said that Carl Dreyer's art begins to unfold just at the point where most directors give up, and this psychological masterpiece, suggesting a fusion of Hawthorne and Kafka, is proof. In 1623, the young second wife of an austere pastor desires his death because of her love for his son; when she tells the pastor of her feelings, he suffers a stroke and dies. Accused of witchcraft, she becomes what she and her accusers believe a witch to be, and as she is trapped, and all possibility of hope is stripped away from her, the viewer's identification with her fear becomes unbearable; then Dreyer dissolves our terror as she is purified beyond even fear. The most intense, powerful film ever made on the subject of witchcraft, it explores the erotic tensions of the "witch" and her accusers. With Lisbeth Movin as the wife and Anna Svierkier as Marthe, the old woman who is arrested and burned at the stake in the great early sequences. The musical arrangements of the "Dies Irae" (which gives the film its title) and the other fateful hymns are by Poul Schierbeck. Not shown outside Denmark until after the war, the movie opened in this country in 1948. In Danish.—*Pauline Kael* (Gramercy Theatre; Feb. 2.)

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING

A slow, attentive movie about a painter and his model demands the kind of patience that moviegoers may feel reluctant to supply. But Peter Webber's reworking of Tracy Chevalier's novel is worth staying with: it casts a heavy spell as it unfolds the tale of Griet (Scarlett Johansson), a maid newly arrived in the house of Johannes Vermeer (Colin Firth). The year is 1665, and the period reconstruction, for those who are aroused by such things, is—apart from a few modern lines of dialogue—formidably detailed. The danger with such beautifying efforts is that cinema will turn into a branch of taxidermy, and what keeps Webber's movie alive is the tenseness of the setup (will this girl stay in the artist's household, and, if so, will she become his lover or his muse?), and, above all, the presence of Johansson. She is often wordless and close to plain onscreen, but wait for the ardor with which she can summon a closeup and bloom under its gaze; this is her film, not Vermeer's, all the way.—*A.L.* (12/15/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG

Ben Kingsley, now sixty, is in great shape. As an Iranian military officer exiled to California, he's the only entertainment in this noble pool of despair. His character, Colonel Massoud Amir Behrani, works on a road crew and as a clerk in a convenience store, but he changes into a perfectly tailored gray suit after each job and returns home in his old Mercedes. He buys a house on the coast that belonged to a messed-up young woman, Kathy (Jennifer Connelly), who lost the place due to a bureaucratic mixup during a depressive stupor. The two go at each other like figures in a classic tragedy—each has his sense of rightness and entitlement—but one can't suppress such philistine sentiments as "If the colonel weren't such a stiff and if Kathy were only a little smarter, the entire mess could have been avoided." The director, Vadim Perelman, was born in Russia and is a man in exile himself. He produces scenes of great intensity, but he doesn't capture the colloquial ease and humor of American life.—*D.D.* (1/12/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE IMMIGRANT

It's one of Chaplin's happiest creations. This 1917 short follows the Little Tramp from a transatlantic passage to a swift courtship in America. At every apparent misstep along the way, the Tramp proves to be an eccentric winner—he even takes the pot at an on-deck card game and defends his loot by wielding a pistol as dexterously as he does his trademark cane. Potential gross-out gags borne of seasickness and onboard dining become the stuff of comic ballet and circus stunts; Chaplin pulls off flatfooted pirouettes and walks the decks like an aerialist, using his limbs and cane as balancing rods. The Tramp remains his own shabby-genteel fellow rather than a symbol of oppression, but there is a wonderful moment when, right after he sees the Statue of Liberty, officers rope him off, along with the rest of the huddled masses, to be processed.—*M.S.* (Thalia Theatre; Jan. 31.)

MONSTER

To play Aileen Wuornos, the real-life prostitute and serial killer who was executed in 2002, Charlize Theron put on thirty pounds and endured an hour and a half of attention each shooting day from the makeup artist Toni G. What's remarkable about the film is not just Theron's transformation into a half-mad, beaten-up prostitute, but the disciplined performance that she gives. The actress twitches and shrugs as if her tendons were directed by will alone. She's telling the world to kiss off, yet, inevitably, she's reduced to sticking out her thumb on the highway in search of a paying customer. When a sczuzy client abuses her, she snaps, empties a revolver into his chest, and lets out a war whoop of triumph. The moment is truly frightening. Theron's ferocity pushes the material over the top, but her tenderness—the flashes of gentleness and vulnerability—retrieves it from tabloid exploitation and camp horror. With Christina Ricci as the petulant lower-middle-class girl who becomes Wuornos's lover. Written and directed by Patty Jenkins and shot in that bedraggled kingdom of chaos, Central Florida.—*D.D.* (1/26/04) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

RUGGLES OF RED GAP

Charles Laughton starred in this justly honored 1935 version of the venerable comedy by Harry Leon Wilson. (There were two earlier versions—one in 1918, and one in 1923 with Edward Everett Horton—and a later version in 1950, called "Fancy Pants," with Bob Hope.) The Laughton film, directed in a calm, restrained style by Leo McCarey, is just about irresistible, even with its big scene—Laughton, an English valet in the Old West, reciting the Gettysburg address in a saloon, as the camera pans across the awed faces of the cowhands. It's a bit much, but it works like magic. The cast could hardly be better: Roland Young is the Englishman who loses the valet in a poker game, Mary Boland and Charlie Ruggles are the rich American couple who win him, and ZaSu Pitts is the widow the valet courts.—*P.K.* (Thalia Theatre; Jan. 31.)

TORQUE

In its own way, an experimental film: how much product placement can be crammed into eighty-one breakneck minutes? The renegade Cary Ford (Martin Henderson) is on the run from two biker gangs, the Reapers, led by Trey Wallace (Ice Cube), and the Hellions, but whenever he has a quiet moment he kicks back with a few Budweisers. His girlfriend, Shane (Monet Mazur), enjoys skidding out in front of Pepsi billboards. In the meantime, there are numerous closeups of custom bikes—the movie's real stars—being ridden by a parade of ethnic bikers. While it takes a certain type of pop imagination to conceive of a cycle so fast that a woman's skirt flies up as it zooms past, the director, Joseph Kahn, doesn't really have many ideas. The movie's tensest moment involves cinema's oldest trick: a speeding train, a helpless victim stranded on the tracks.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

TOUCHING THE VOID

Kevin Macdonald's new film is a dismaying documentary account of what happened on the side of a mountain in 1985. Two young British climbers, Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, ascended the west face of Siula Grande, in the Peruvian Andes, and then began their descent. Simpson slipped and injured his leg, then fell again, this time off the brink of a ridge. He was hanging from the end of a rope; at the other end, sliding fast, was Yates, who cut the rope to save himself. You come out of the movie arguing hotly—as Macdonald wants you to do—about the rights and wrongs of that dire moment, and musing on the fact that Simpson survived his ordeal. The two men tell their story with a sang-froid verging on the comical, intercut with a dramatic reconstruction of the climb itself. The cinematography, all vertiginous horror and beauty, is by Mike Eley; it leaves us with a mad inkling of what drives a mountaineer, as well as a determination to stay, at all costs, on the level.—*A.L.* (1/19/04) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE FOG OF WAR
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

IN AMERICA (12/1/03)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING (1/5/04)
Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street, and Union Square.

MY ARCHITECT
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

MYSTIC RIVER (12/22 & 29/03)
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, 34th Street Theatre, Village East Cinemas and Ziegfeld.

TEACHER'S PET
Empire 25, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and Village East Cinemas.

TO BE AND TO HAVE (9/29/03)
Cinema Village.

THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE (12/1/03)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.

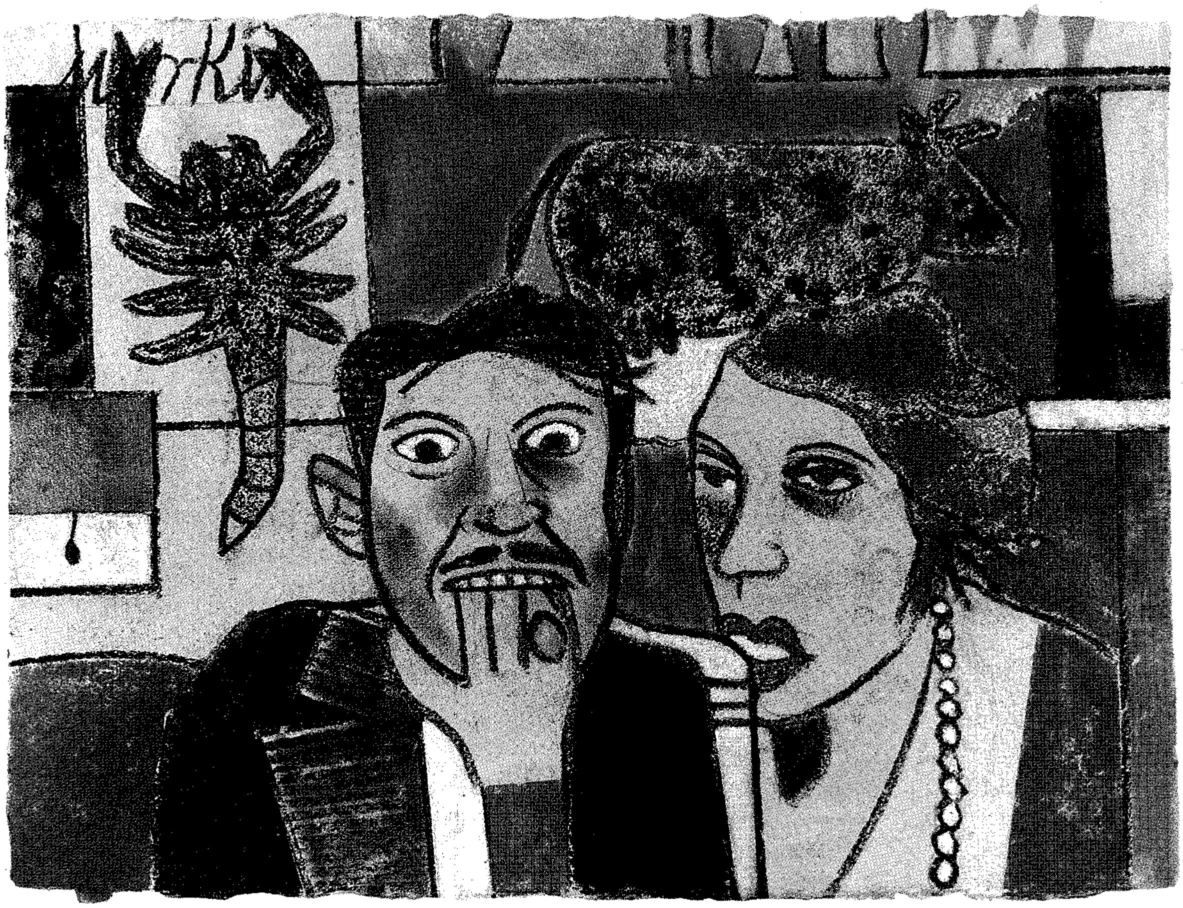
WIN A DATE WITH TAD HAMILTON
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Theatre.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema Classics, 332 E. 11th St. (212-677-6309).
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.

New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.



At Film Forum, two collaborations by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, "L'Âge d'Or" (above) and "Un Chien Andalou."

RICHARD MERKIN

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Feb. 8: "Great Performances," introduced by New York film critics. Jan. 31 at 2: "Possessed" (1931, Clarence Brown). ♦ Jan. 31 at 4: "Dodsworth" (1936, William Wyler). ♦ Feb. 1 at 2: "Dazed and Confused" (1993, Richard Linklater). ♦ Feb. 1 at 4: "Georgia" (1995, Ulu Grosbard). ♦ Repertory nights. Jan. 30 at 7:30 and Jan. 31-Feb. 1 at 6:30: "Ali: Fear Eats the Soul" (1974, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Jan. 28-29 at 7 and 9:30: "Piccadilly" (1929, E. A. Dupont). ♦ Films selected by *The Onion*. Jan. 29 at 8: "Pootie Tang" (2001, Louis C. K.). ♦ Two American premières. Jan. 30 at 7 and Jan. 31-Feb. 3 at 7 and 9:30: "Meanwhile a Butterfly Flies" (2002, Julius Ziz) and "My Country Is Cinema: Scenes from the Life of Jonas Mekas" (2000, Brigitte Cornand). ♦ Special presentation. Jan. 30 and Feb. 3 at 8: "Art Watch" (2003, James Aviles Martin). ♦ Essential cinema. Jan. 31 at 1:30: "The Art of Vision" (1961-65, Stan Brakhage). ♦ Rare screening. Jan. 31 at 6:30 and 10 and Feb. 1 at 6:30 and 9: "Dust Devil" (1992, Richard Stanley), introduced by the director.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Jan. 28-29 at 1:20, 1:50, 3:50, 4:20, 7, 7:30, 9:30, and 9:50 and Jan. 30-Feb. 3 at 1:20, 3:50, 7, and 9:30: "The Battle of Algiers" (1965, Gillo Pontecorvo; in French and Arabic). ♦ Jan. 30-Feb. 2 at 2, 3:40, 5:20, 7, and 8:40 and Feb. 3 at 2, 3:40, and 5:20: "L'Âge d'Or" (1930, Luis Buñuel; in French) and "Un Chien Andalou" (†). ♦ Feb. 3 at 7: "Carmen Jones" (1954, Otto Preminger), followed by an interview with Marilyn Horne, who provided the singing voice for Dorothy Dandridge in the film.

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 30: A tribute to the French studio Pathé. Feb. 3 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "La Petite Lise" (1930, Jean Grémillon; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Feb. 27: "The Hidden God: Film and Faith." Jan. 29 at 2 and Jan. 31 at 1: "Red Beard" (1965, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ Jan. 29 at 6: "L'Amore" (1948, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian). ♦ Jan. 30 at 2 and Jan. 31 at 4:30: "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977, Steven Spielberg). ♦ Jan. 30 at 6: "The Man Who Would Be King" (1975, John Huston). ♦ Jan. 30 at 8:30 and Feb. 1 at 4:30: "Breaking the Waves" (1996, Lars Von Trier). ♦ Jan. 31 at 7:15: "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ Jan. 31 at 9:15: "Utamaro and His Five Women" (1946, Kenji Mizoguchi; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 1 at 1: "Magnolia" (1999, Paul Thomas Anderson). ♦ Feb. 1 at 7:30: "Voyage to Italy" (1953, Rossellini). ♦ Feb. 2 at 6: "White" (1994, Krzysztof Kieslowski; in Polish and French). ♦ Feb. 2 at 8: "Day of Wrath" (†). ♦ Remembering Elia Kazan. Jan. 29 at 8: "America America" (1963).

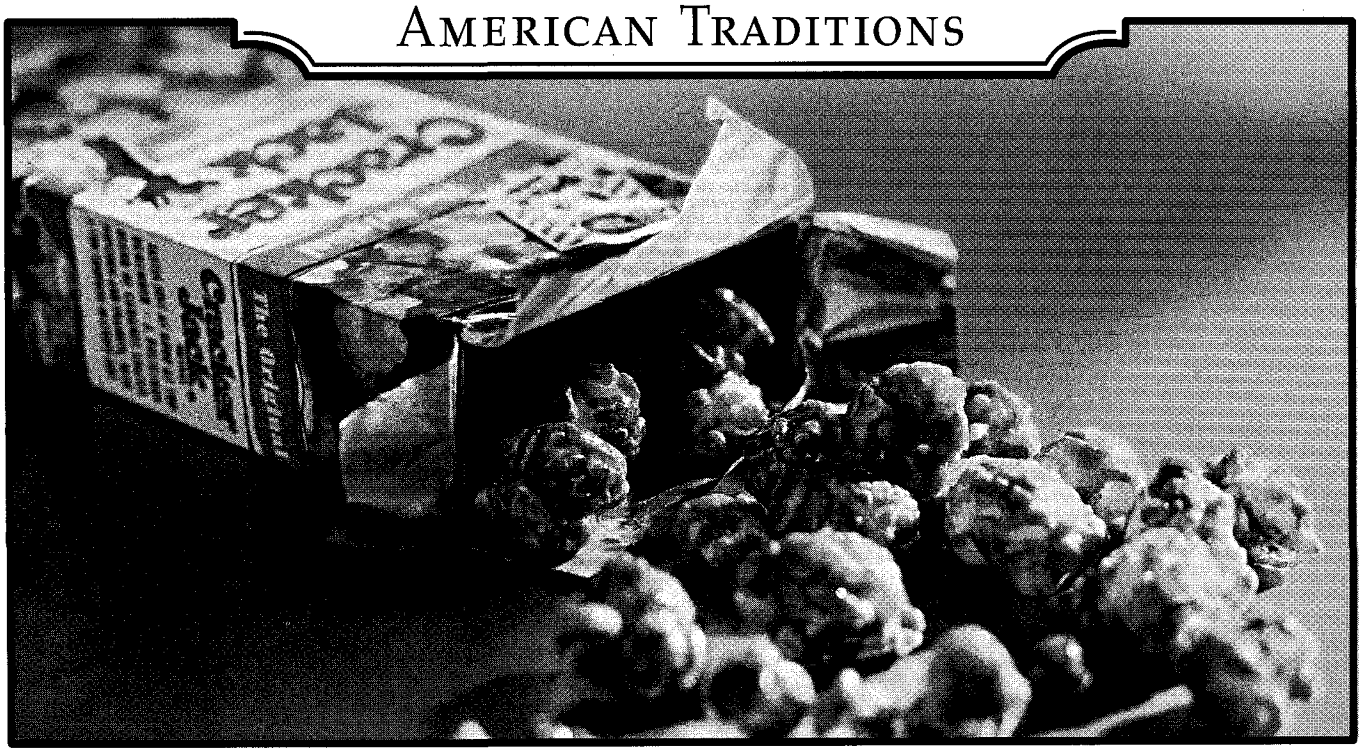
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Through Jan. 31: A Federico Fellini retrospective. All films are in Italian. Jan. 28 at 7: "Intervista" (1988). ♦ Jan. 30-31 at 7: "The Voice of the Moon" (1990).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Jan. 30-31: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Martin Scorsese).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through Feb. 14: "The Hilarious History of the World." Jan. 31 at 2: "Duck Soup" (1933, Leo McCarey). ♦ Jan. 31 at 3:30: "Ruggles of Red Gap" (†). ♦ Jan. 31 at 6: "To Be or Not to Be" (1942, Ernst Lubitsch). ♦ Jan. 31 at 7:45: "The Immigrant" (†), "I'll Never Heil Again" (1941, Jules White), and "Men O'War" (1929, Lewis R. Foster). ♦ Feb. 1 at 2: "Ninotchka" (1939, Lubitsch). ♦ Feb. 1 at 4: "A Foreign Affair" (1948, Billy Wilder). ♦ Feb. 1 at 7: "M*A*S*H" (1970, Robert Altman). ♦ Feb. 1 at 9:15: "Good Morning, Vietnam" (1987, Barry Levinson).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Jan. 29: The 2004 New York Jewish Film Festival. Jan. 28 at 1 and Jan. 29 at 3:30 and 8:30: "Rose's Songs" (2002, Andor Szilágy; in Hungarian). ♦ Jan. 28 at 6 and Jan. 29 at 1 and 6: "Shalom Ireland" (2003, Valerie Lapin Ganley) and "France Divided" (2002, Barbara P. Barnett and Eileen M. Angelini; in French). ♦ Starting Jan. 30: "History Lessons: The Films of Jerzy Kawalerowicz." All films are in Polish. Jan. 30 at 2 and 6:15 and Feb. 2 at 4 and 8:45: "Mother Joan of the Angels" (1961). ♦ Jan. 30 at 4:15 and 8:45: "Night Train" (1959). ♦ Jan. 31 at 2:30 and Feb. 3 at 1 and 7:30: "Pharaoh" (1966). ♦ Jan. 31 at 6: "Death of a President" (1977). ♦ Jan. 31 at 9: "Austeria" (1982). ♦ Feb. 1 at 2 and Feb. 2 at 1:30 and 6:20: "A Night of Remembrance" (1954). ♦ Feb. 1 at 4:20: "Under the Phrygian Star" (1954; Spanish subtitles, with simultaneous English translation). ♦ Feb. 1 at 6:45: "Quo Vadis" (2001).

AMERICAN TRADITIONS



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AMERICAN
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THE
NEW YORKER

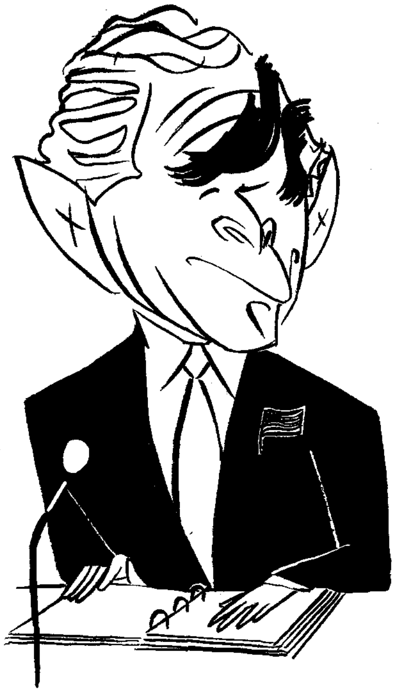
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
UNSTEADY STATE

George W. Bush says he wants to go to Mars—a motion that many of his fellow-citizens would heartily second—but he probably doesn't mean it. The speech in which he announced his "New Vision for Space Exploration" was exceedingly vague about how and when the trip was to be made. It did say that in 2015 or maybe in 2020 Americans would be going back to the moon, where they would build a base for "human missions to Mars and to worlds beyond." An official likened this speech to President Kennedy's address of May 25, 1961, in which he asked the nation to "commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."

A week later came Bush's State of the Union address, the text of which one scans in vain for any mention of Mars, the moon, or space exploration. The subject has already been dropped. (By contrast, Kennedy's 1962 State of the Union reiterated and discussed the lunar excursion he had proposed eight months before.) Nor is a short attention span the only sign of Bush's lack of seriousness about his interplanetary venture. There is also its Wal-Mart price tag. The President is asking Congress for an extra two hundred million dollars per year, about what it costs to make a movie like "Waterworld." Another couple of billion is to be cannibalized out of the existing space budget. This kind of money will get no one to Mars, but that isn't to say that Bush's project will yield no results. It has already led to the cancellation of maintenance on the Hubble Space Telescope, NASA's most scientifically valuable project, which means that the Hubble will go blind in three or four years' time. Bush's "New Vision" is a sharp stick in the eye.

Polls published between the two Bush speeches revealed a distinct lack of public enthusiasm for the President's space proposal, and it will be surprising if he mentions it again anytime soon. But "Mars," "the moon," and "space" are not the only words missing in action from the State of the Union. So are "unemployment," "AIDS," and "the environment." "Deficit" makes but a single appearance, as part of an utterly unconvincing, detail-free assertion that the gigantic budget shortfalls with which Bush has replaced the surpluses he inherited can be halved in five years if Congress would just "focus on priorities."



The word "war," on the other hand, makes a dozen appearances in the speech, while "terror" and its derivatives appear twenty times. The surrounding contexts suggest that Bush and his political handlers plan to use 9/11 and its aftermath every bit as ruthlessly this year as they did in 2002, when Republicans captured control of the Senate by portraying Democrats as friends of terrorism. (The most prominent victim of this strategy was Senator Max Cleland, of Georgia, who lost three limbs fighting in Vietnam, and who was defeated by ads showing his face alongside those of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein.) In 2004, according to Bush, "we face a choice: we can go forward with confidence and resolve, or we can turn back to the dangerous illusion that terrorists are not plotting and outlaw regimes are no threat to us." If the choice he is talking about is November's (and what else could it be?), then this is slander. The illusion that Bush describes is shared by none of the four remaining Democratic candidates with a chance at nomination. Nor, by the way, do any of them

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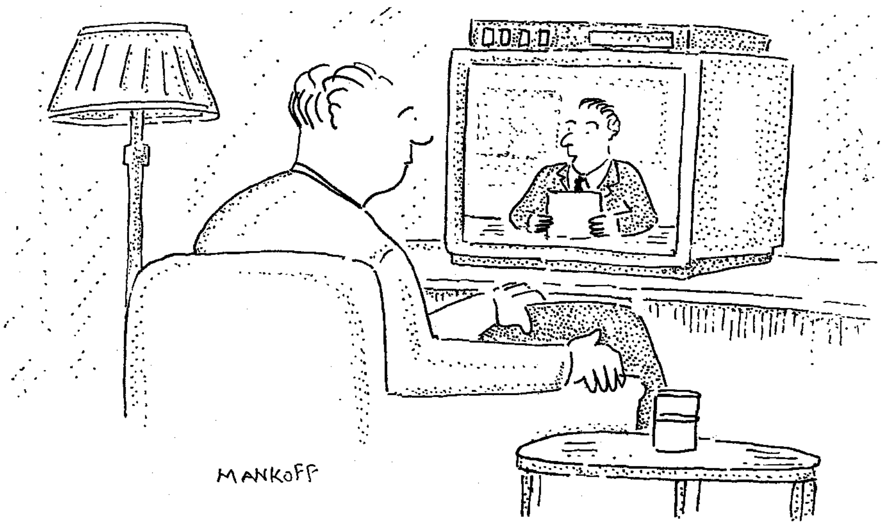

" 'President Bush's tax policies are deeply flawed,' candidate Dean shrieked today."

• •

doubt that the Iraqi people are better off without the regime of Saddam Hussein. And, while all four are for other reasons critical of Bush's Iraq policies, all recognize that, like it or not, the rehabilitation of Iraq is now an American responsibility.

The truth is that at this point no one can be sure whether the Iraq war, in its over-all effect, will turn out in the end to have helped or hindered the larger campaign against Islamist terrorism. What does seem fairly clear is that Iraq's biological, chemical, and, especially, nuclear weapons did not exist. Public and congressional support for the war, as well as the scattered international support it enjoyed, was therefore purchased falsely and, to a degree not yet known, dishonestly. There has been a serious breach of trust, which cannot fail to have damaging results. "For diplomacy to be effective, words must be credible, and no one can now doubt the word of America," the President said in his speech, and for a moment one couldn't be sure one had heard him right. Was he speaking ironically? America's word—the present Administration's, anyway—has in fact been cast into the deepest doubt, and that is one of the reasons its diplomacy has not been effective. Bush was talking about Libya's promise, post-Iraq, to abandon its (not very scary) nuclear ambitions, and what he actually meant, of course, is that no one now doubts America's will to make war. But that is not true, either. Iraq has stretched the Pentagon's legions thin, and the misinformation that the Administration promulgated, from whatever admixture of intelligence failure and deliberate distortion, means that it will no longer be possible to rally domestic or international support for military adventures in the absence of a clear and independently verifiable *casus belli.* Washington's word won't do.

Bush's only serious (that is, expensive) domestic program, as always, is yet another mammoth tax entitlement for the rich and the superrich. The new plan would make permanent his earlier tax cuts, which, in a gimmick designed to make future deficits look less terrifying, were scheduled to expire in 2010. This new round of relief for the unneedy, like the previous three, is to be financed (though the President didn't mention this part) by confiscating the Social Security "trust fund," curtailing federal activities that benefit society at large, and borrowing more trillions—taking out a fourth mortgage on the future, payable to foreign creditors. The rest of Bush's proposals were either ruinously expensive, socially poisonous non-starters (such as privatizing Social Security) or cheap cuts of wormy red meat for the conservative and evangelical base. Of the latter the cheapest was an exhortation to professional athletes to quit taking steroids, the wormiest a threat to deface the Constitution with anti-gay graffiti.

In last year's State of the Union, Bush's buzz phrase was "weapons of mass destruction," the threat of which justified the impending conquest of Iraq. This year's speech subsumed that phrase into the longer, mealier "weapons of mass destruction-related program activities," a usefully adaptable locution. Were teams of inspectors to fan out across Bush's domestic policies in search of solutions to the nation's problems, they would be less likely to return empty-handed if they settle for environment-related program activities (such as logging in national forests), education-related program activities (such as requiring tests without providing the funds to help kids pass them), and health care-related program activities (such as forbidding Medicare to negotiate for lower drug prices). Like the speech itself, all this comes under the heading of winning the election-related program activities. Here's hoping it will prove equally effective.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

RELOCATION DEPT.
NET LOSS

First things first: the proposed site of the new Brooklyn Nets arena is not, as some have suggested, the same as the one selected almost fifty years ago by the reviled Walter O'Malley, to keep the Dodgers around. That site, which was to have been occupied by a geodesic dome designed by the Princeton student Billy Kleinsasser (the old model sat for years in his parents' basement, in Tennessee), is across the street from where the new Nets owner, Bruce Ratner, wants to move his new team. It is now home to Atlantic Terminal, a high-rise work-in-progress that is also being developed by Bruce Ratner.

New York is a big town, with a lot of teams, and we don't have to look nearly so far back in time—or to such nostalgic standbys as the Brooklyn Dodgers—to come up with noteworthy stadium and arena unveilings for comparison. Remember Fred Wilpon, the Mets owner, posing for photographers in 1998 with his Ebbets Field-inspired mockup? At half a billion dollars (retractable roof included), that was a bargain compared with the latest estimates (just last month) for a Yan-

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kees home in Macombs Dam Park, in the Bronx: eight hundred million, with about half to come from the public coffers, and half from Mr. Steinbrenner. The West Side Jets stadium dream is more ambitious still, with a price tag above one and a half billion, all told. (To judge from the architects' renderings that have appeared in the papers, this development would have the bonus effect of doubling the number of trees in Hell's Kitchen. Apparently, football fans would also be arriving at the games by sailboat instead of by car.)

In the past few years, the Islanders, too, have announced plans for a new Coliseum, and the Knicks and the Rangers have continued agitating for a new Garden. Extending the search a half-dozen miles west of the Hudson, we can include the Devils (and the Nets, pre-Ratner), who have designed at least two new prospective homes—one above the ferry terminal in Hoboken and one, more recently, in downtown Newark. Only the Giants seem content to remain where they are. So if there is a stadium-seat manufacturer looking to expand his business, let him come here, where a quarter million new seat orders await processing. To be fair, unlike just about every town in the land, the New York area hasn't seen a new big-league stadium or arena built since the Carter Administration, and that was in New Jersey, in the Meadowlands, from which the Nets are now bolting. But it's hard to think of a city that has built seven.

It didn't take long for reporters and columnists to figure out that asking Jason Kidd how he'd like to run the backcourt in Brooklyn, instead of in East Rutherford, might be jumping the gun. Optimistic projections have the Nets staying in Jersey until 2008. Wilpon, of course, intended to have the Mets out of Shea Stadium by 2002, but they have yet to so much as dig a foundation. Neil deMause, who maintains FieldofSchemes.com, a Web site devoted to studying myths about stadium-financing ploys, takes what he calls the "extremely skeptical" view. (The site, which is updated almost every day—and sometimes several times each day—tracks boondoggles in St. Paul, West Palm Beach, Pittsburgh, and beyond.)

"I'd guess it's probably fifty-fifty the arena gets built entirely," deMause said last week, at his home in Flatbush—a few subway stops from New Nets HQ. His neighbors were already mobilizing to fight Ratner's plans. "I wouldn't be shocked if five years from now we're still arguing the logistics." By then, Jason Kidd will be going on thirty-six, with just one year remaining on his contract; Dan Doctoroff will be putting together a bid for the 2020 Olympics; and legislators here and in Washington will be talking—and perhaps even leaking gorgeous schematics—of a gleaming future home for the Nets, or the Yankees, or the Rangers and the Knicks, on an undeveloped tract in the Gusev crater on the planet Mars.

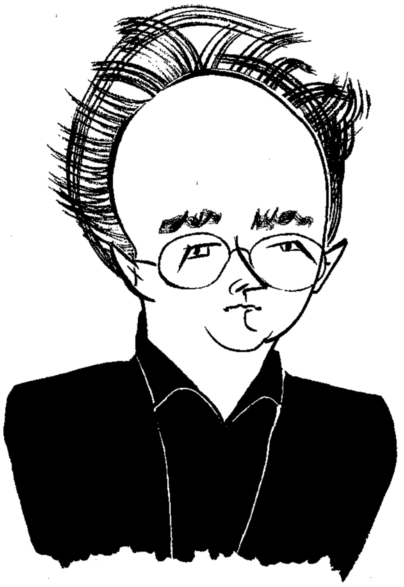
—Ben McGrath

LONDON POSTCARD
DARK MATERIAL

Unless you reserved a seat in December, even before the reviews came out, the only way you can see the adaptation of Philip Pullman's trilogy "His Dark Materials," at the National Theatre in London this winter, is to stand in line and hope to get one of the thirty seats or sixty spaces for standees that are set aside for sale on the day of the performance. Otherwise, you will have to miss a play that lasts six hours (it can be seen in one sitting, with a dinner break, or on separate days, in three-hour segments); includes witches, angels, armored polar bears, talking dolls who ride dragonflies, evil prelates, a hundred and seventeen scene changes, multiple universes, Timothy Dalton, and a hot-air balloon; and features one of the few theatrical representations of the death of God (who turns out to be a tiny old guy in a plastic casket, and who, when he has his big moment, literally croaks). The run ends in March, and the production was designed for a special multitiered revolving stage, in the Olivier Theatre at the National, so it's not likely to be remounted anywhere else. There are plans, though, to bring it back at the end of 2004.

The first volume of Pullman's trilogy, called "Northern Lights" in England and "The Golden Compass" in the United States, came out in 1995. The books are basically for twelve-year-olds, but they have acquired a following rivalling that of "The Lord of the Rings." The claim is based on an empirical finding. Last fall, in a BBC poll undertaken to determine "the UK's best-loved book," "His Dark Materials" finished third, behind "Pride and Prejudice" and the great Frododyssey itself. (The BBC received three-quarters of a million votes. "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" finished fifth, just ahead of "To Kill a Mockingbird," "Winnie the Pooh," and "1984." "Ulysses" limped across the line in seventy-eighth place.)

At a recent performance, a few people left during the dinner break, but not many, and though there were plenty of twelve-year-olds in the audience, it was by no means a young crowd. And there were no complaints heard afterward about the length. The reviews, when they did appear, were mixed; some critics were unhappy because the play wasn't enough like the books, which they loved, and some were unhappy because it was too much like the books, which they thought were overrated. "Whatever their merits," the reviewer for the *Daily Mail* remarked, "they are not Charles Dickens or Victor Hugo." The critics, though, were grownups. The kids at the theatre seemed thrilled.



Philip Pullman

The kids were probably not aware that Pullman's title, "His Dark Materials," is a phrase from "Paradise Lost." They were probably not aware, either, that the books are intended as an answer to Milton, and an attack on Christian theology and the Church. This is not something that has been missed by the Church, of course. The Association of

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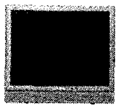

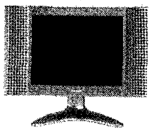

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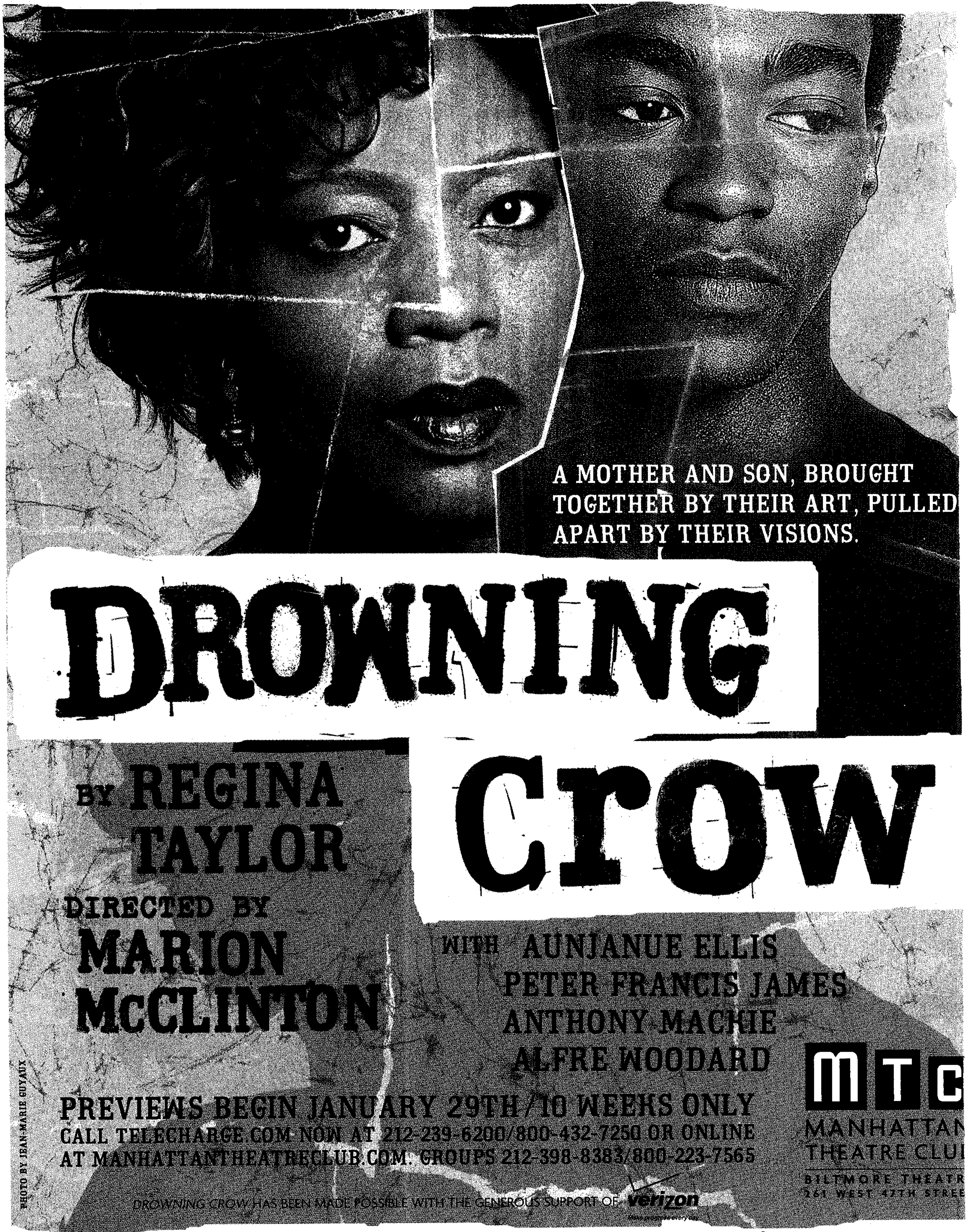

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Christian Teachers, in England, pronounced the show "blasphemous," and called for it to be banned. In Pullman's story, the death of God is a good thing, a step forward for the universe. It releases the teen-age heroes, Will and Lyra—played by two excellent young actors, Dominic Cooper and Anna Maxwell Martin—from a world of guilt and oppression and phony purity. Somehow, the cascade of imaginary beings is so overwhelming and the occasional discourses on the nature of the universe are so opaque that the theological point is almost completely buried. The chief villain in the story is the head of the Church, a cold-blooded control freak in purple robes. He is played, by Stephen Greif, as Donald Rumsfeld—slicked-back silver hair, rimless glasses, nasal American accent. Maybe this interpretation was intended to deflect the books' animus away from established religion and toward an entity whose wickedness these days is, in Europe, somewhat less controversial.

Pullman also has a following in the United States—his prose is more elegant and his plots are more sophisticated than Tolkien's or J. K. Rowling's—and a lot of people in the theatre for that January performance were Americans. A three-movie adaptation is in the works, to be produced by Scholastic Entertainment in collaboration with New Line Cinema, which produced Peter Jackson's three-movie adaptation of "The Lord of the Rings." A script for the first volume has already been written, by Tom Stoppard. Pop mythology used to be the specialty of the United States, but Britain is on the verge of becoming its leading producer. It's not the worst position for a former empire to find itself in; there seems to be no end to the demand for the stuff.

—*Louis Menand*

SEVENTEEN OTHER IMPORTANT SWING VOTING GROUPS

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Time-share dreamers
Solitaire losers
Tan popular types
Bonefishing office acquaintances
Extreme-sports fake friends

—*Zev Borow*

THE PICTURES
AGAINST TYPE

The former dancer and model Charlize Theron, who stands five feet nine inches tall in her stocking feet, was in town recently to promote the new film "Monster," in which she plays the serial killer Aileen Wuornos, who was executed by lethal injection in 2002 for murdering seven men. The chance to play against type (as Wuornos, Theron wears oversized prosthetic teeth, brown contact lenses, and heavy makeup simulating freckles, sun damage, and a lifetime of booze) is what attracted Theron to the material. "I mean, I could have gone on forever—well, at least another ten years—as 'that girl,'" Theron said over lunch. Dressed in dark trousers and a black V-necked sweater, and wearing a pendant around her long white neck, Theron, who is twenty-eight, was the very image of the roles she has played in the past, in such movies as "Reindeer Games" and "The Italian Job": blond, intelligent, ambitious women capable of detonating a bomb at a moment's notice. "But what's the point of going on in those kinds of parts if it doesn't mean anything?" she continued. "My cup was filled, but I had to turn it over and make everything spill out and look at the mess in order to make me different." After ordering a Coke and a bowl of tomato soup, she tore off a corner of the *Times* and wrapped her gum in it. "I'm a real classy date," she said.

"Honey, Aileen couldn't get *arrested*," Theron went on. "Wait. That came out weird. Of course she got arrested—a lot—but she couldn't turn her life around. She was always trying to get away from prostitution. She tried to join the Army, but they wouldn't take her because she was deaf in one ear. Still, she never lost her hope—her belief—that there was something better out there." Though Wuornos dreamed of being a star of one sort or another, Theron didn't; she grew up on a farm in Benoni, South Africa, where she spoke Afrikaans ("When I came to the States, I barely spoke English") and studied ballet. "There weren't a lot of movies out there," Theron recalled. "So I danced. I remember this travelling circus would come through town, and I remember how much I loved how free the people looked, becoming someone else. All those feelings! And in a character! That looked like a pretty cool thing to me. So after I'd had fourteen broken toes and been taking eight hours of dance a day, my mom said, 'You like to tell stories. Get out of here and tell them.' So I jumped on a plane to L.A. I was eighteen years old. I didn't know one soul. I worked as a model. I didn't have a green card. Otherwise, I would have been a waitress."

When Theron was fifteen, she saw her mother shoot and kill her father—an abusive drunk—in self-defense. "I think one of the reasons Patty"—Patty Jenkins, who wrote and directed "Monster"—"clicked with me and I with her is that we both grew up on our own, and fast," Theron said. "No regrets. And never whine. What's the point? Patty had such a hard time, wanting me to be in this film. You know, there's money out there for true-crime movies—if you want to shoot them for a hundred thousand dollars in Romania, with Romanian actors. After I signed on, we could get a somewhat bigger budget. 'Monster' cost five million to make, plus we had to shoot it in four weeks. Poor Patty! People were, like, 'You better not make Charlize Theron ugly!' Fuck that. I didn't work on Aileen from the outside in. After I read the writing she did in jail, she was in my body, and I was in hers." Just then, Theron's assistant arrived: she had a photo shoot to get to. When a lunch companion suggested that she might not want to take the Halle Berry route should she be nominated for an Oscar for "Monster," and win—soul-searching performance followed by a turn as a Bond girl—Theron threw her head back and howled. She motioned to her assistant to write this down: "Note to self. Do not become Halle Berry."

—*Hilton Als*

CAMPAIGN JOURNAL
OUT OF IOWA

On the eve of the Iowa caucuses, Teresa Heinz Kerry told a rally of more than a thousand Democrats at the state fairgrounds in Des Moines that she "felt very at home" in Iowa. "It's almost like where I grew up," she said, which was startling, because her husband, the senator and Presidential candidate John Kerry, had just told the crowd that she grew up in Mozambique. Like many Americans, she is a naturalized citizen, and in her childhood knew America only "as an ideal," Kerry said. She "never saw her father vote till he was seventy-one years old, because they lived in a dictatorship."

The Senator was losing his voice. He resorted frequently to a water bottle, but his throat refused to produce anything more than a ragged stage whisper. Still, he sounded positively stentorian in comparison with his wife. Although she held the mike close, her words, tinged with a lilting Portuguese accent, never rose above a breathy murmur. The audience fell silent and listened as if eavesdropping on a private soliloquy.

Heinz Kerry, who inherited a vast fortune from her first husband, John Heinz, the ketchup heir and a Republican senator from Pennsylvania, is known for the surprising turns of her unscripted public pronouncements. She can be nearly as unbuttoned in her speech as Kerry is buttoned up in his, with the result that she is sometimes impolitic and always worth listening to. Now she pursued her unlikely comparison of Iowa and Africa, finding that the Hawkeye State measured up well against the mother continent. There was "the earthiness" of the Iowans, and there was the "sparse, very clean, very beautiful" landscape, and there were the little farming towns with their churches, just like the settlements known as "dorps" in southern Africa. She liked the word "dorps"; it seemed to make Iowa more real to her.

Never mind that Iowa's population is ninety-four per cent white and that the place is harrowingly cold in January. Teresa Heinz Kerry had a larger point to make. She had spent a lot of time in Iowa, stumping for her husband, and, despite the comforting sense of familiarity, she said, "I was shy in the beginning." She hadn't been able to articulate why she was resistant to politicking until John Norris, Kerry's campaign manager in Iowa, who helped organize post-Communist elections in Macedonia, told her that the biggest challenge there had been getting newly democratized politicians to come out and ask people to support them. "I realized that deep inside here I am still afraid of a turnaround in the political system where you get punished or you lose your job or get sent to jail," she said. "Even though I'm not afraid to stand up myself, I was shy about asking people to vote."

ERIC PALMA

The candidate's wife had come to praise Iowa, but her initial unease with the Democratic nominating system there was well founded. After all, Iowans don't actually vote in January. They caucus, and caucuses cannot be said to meet the fundamental standards by which elections are judged free and fair elsewhere in the country, or throughout the world. Iowans must gather at a fixed time on caucus day—six-thirty in the evening—in an open room, where they express their political preference publicly. If a candidate receives the nod from fewer than fifteen per cent of those present, the people who supported him engage in a political version of musical chairs, crossing the room to choose another candidate, or declaring themselves undecided, or just leaving.

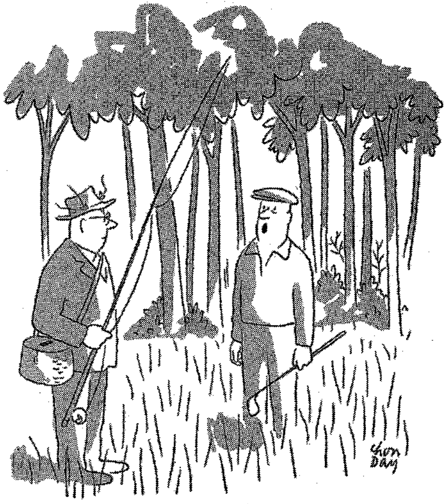
Gordon Fischer, Iowa's Democratic Party chairman, has likened the caucus procedure to a session of "sixth-grade gym." But why put down sixth graders? The caucuses are directly at odds with the principles of one person, one vote and the secret ballot, which are—our electoral college notwithstanding—held sacrosanct in almost every democracy on earth. Not surprisingly, voter participation in caucuses is consistently low. Dan Herndon, a retired Methodist minister who was attending a rally for John Edwards in Waterloo, Iowa, said that his son was working an evening job and his wife was out of town. "So essentially both of them are disenfranchised," Herndon said, adding, "The elderly, people who have trouble going out at night, and people who don't like to talk in groups or be part of groups are also disenfranchised. It's not the ideal system."

If an election in a Third World country—let's say, Mozambique—were conducted like an Iowa caucus, it might well be condemned by international monitors as a gross human-rights violation. As it happened, on the same day that Iowans went to stand for their candidates in town halls, churches, fire stations, and, yes, sixth-grade gyms, a hundred thousand Iraqis took their stand in the streets of Baghdad, protesting the Bush Administration's attempt to impose a caucus-driven electoral system on them. They wanted one Iraqi, one vote.

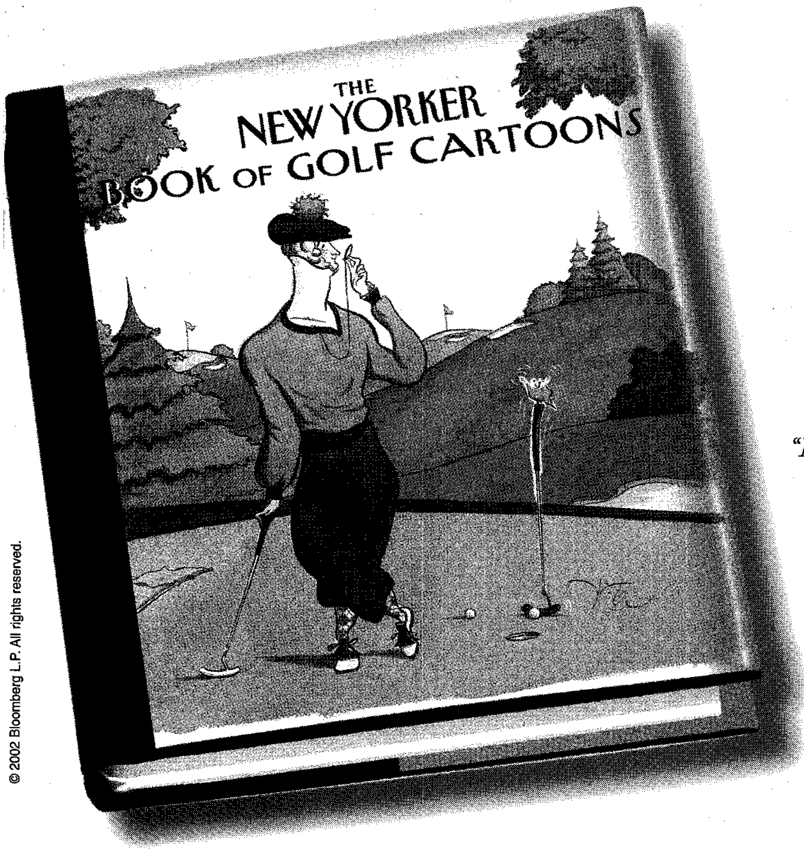
Iowans claim, in defense of their peculiar, and disproportionately influential, ritual for picking Presidential candidates, that their habit of producing surprising outcomes proves the system's freeness and fairness. The public, disputatious nature of the caucuses is celebrated as evidence of civic vitality and the glory of an open society. This year, Democrats who considered Howard Dean a liability to the Party's hope of reclaiming the White House are inclined to agree. They are talking about what happened in Iowa as a flowering of political sanity. Perhaps the caucus system ain't so bad, they say. But it's not the system that deserves credit. If you like and trust Iowans' political judgment, why not afford them the opportunities other Americans enjoy? Next time around, give them the vote.

—Philip Gourevitch

Tee up for laughter!



"No, I found my ball. I'm looking for the golf course."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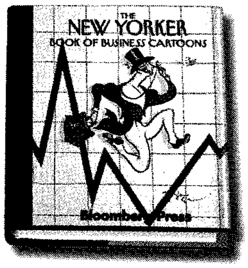
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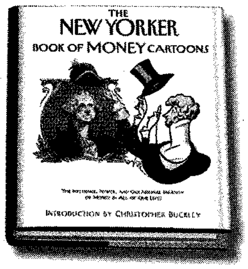
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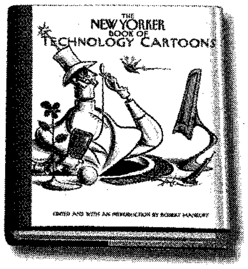
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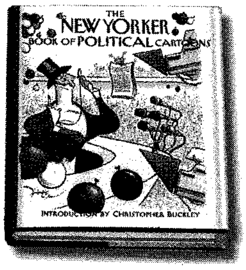
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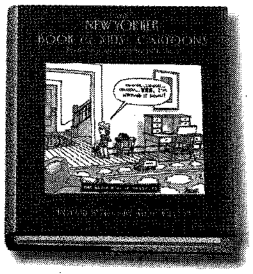
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SHOUTS & MURMURS

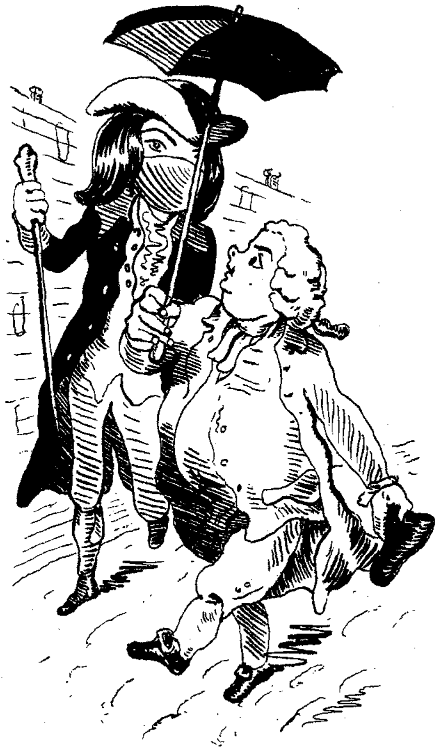
BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JACKSON

BY PATRICIA MARX

As I had the honour and happiness of being a fan for upward of twenty years, except when I was a groupie of Menudo; as I was very assiduous in recording everything having to do with him on my TiVo and on a minuscule camera that I planted in an ice cube when I feigned the character of a room-service manservant at the luxurious Adlon Hotel, in Berlin, where he was staying and dangling his fledgling; as I have spared no pains in obtaining materials concerning him, not all of them technically legal, from every quarter, and that includes a friend of the second cousin of the brother of someone in the same book club as the tennis partner of the gentlewoman who once sauntered along the same boulevard as the half brother of Macaulay Culkin's father's driver; as I have been favoured (for a considerable fee) with the most liberal communications by the lady who grooms Bubbles, his chimpanzee; as I had a notebook and a pencil, I flatter myself that few biographers have entered upon such a Work as this with more advantages, in which I am not proud enough to compare myself to some of the great names who have gone before me in this kind of scription, such as Nat Henley, at the Scranton *Scum*.

Michael Joseph Jackson was born on August 29, 1958, in Gary, Indiana, and, whilst I was not present at the birth, indeed I must notwithstanding report, firsthand and with unimpeachable precision, that upon delivery he was taken forthwith to Dr. Lou Barkley, who operated on his umbilical cord and treated it with a laser peel to moderate its yuckiness.

That he was extraordinary, even in his earliest years, may easily be deduced. A childhood companion, Buddy H. Hempel, has preserved a few anecdotes of young Jackson, regretting that he was not a more diligent collector of them, for by that means he could garner a six-figure advance for a memoir. Of Jackson's precocity, Hempel says, "When a boy, he was *already* notably fond of other children, and, as you know, he maintained his fondness for them into middle age." Anent this estimation, I am informed that Jackson mused for a time, then uttered something. Alas, it was inaudible.



BARRY BLITT

No more of his conversation appears in my journal, for, to be frank, we lived on separate continents from this time forward (and backward) and thus I was not in contact with him. Verily, I did not lay eyes on him in my lifetime. This notwithstanding, I am obliged to relate a droll remark that he may have made during his callow years. On that occasion, the Jackson family was supping but young Jackson was firm in his insistence on supping only on red M&M's. "When a boy is tired of M&M's of the red sort," said he, "he is tired of life; for there is in M&M's of the red sort all that life can afford."

And here is a proper place to give an account of Jackson's views on the practise of bedding. Jackson shewed himself to be articulate in respect of this matter whilst in correspondence with a Mistress E. Taylor, formerly of London, who recounted a torrid alliance in which she was engaged. The letters are not extant, but nevertheless it behooves me to quote from one that I may perhaps have perused. "Ma'am, a grown woman in a grown man's bed is like a dog's walking on his hind legs," penned Jackson. "It is not done well, but you are surprised to find that it is done at all."

A few of Jackson's other sayings shall be inserted at this time:

On matrimony to Lisa Marie Presley: "'Tis better to remain silent and be thought to have a Beard than to open one's mouth and have one's nose fall off."

On the taking seize of one's crotch: "The triumph of hope over experience."

On sartorial matters: "A waistcoat without epaulets is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

On the cultivation of industrious work habits: "Depend upon it, sir, that when a man knows he is to be arraigned by the Santa Barbara County Superior Court in a fortnight it concentrates the minds and fax machines of his public-relations people wonderfully."

On joy: "Nintendo GameCube is itself a species of happiness, and, perhaps, the chief happiness which this world affords."

On theology: "If you believe, clap your hands! Don't let Tink die!"

On destiny and damnation: "A man of genius has been seldom ruined but by Nat Henley, of the Scranton *Scum*." (Also attributed to Ann Landers.)

This is the juncture when proportion urges that I withdraw, with regret, from these modest ruminations. Albeit it is my ungovernable vanity that gives me to possibly believe that you desire to hear more of this Life, and in particular concerning the parlous event that now assails my venerable subject. Sirs and madams, what remains to mind is my deep want of a ticket to the courtroom. I have what is alleged to be the solitary glove. Though it appears to be of ill fit, pray let us, as civilized persons, assay to make a deal. ♦

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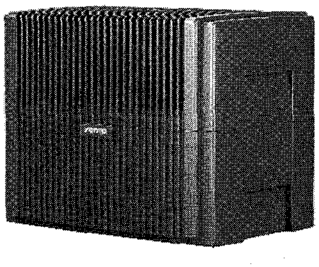

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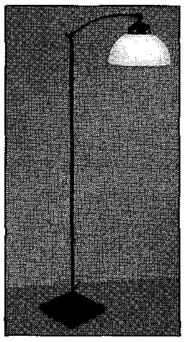

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

DEALERSHIP

How Marian Goodman quietly changed the contemporary-art market.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Goodman's epiphany came in Europe, in the sixties. Photograph by Richard Avedon.

"Serious," the art dealer Marian Goodman said. I had asked her to guess how other people in the art world regarded her. Concentrating, she paused between phrases. "Responsible. A passionate advocate for my artists. Batting average pretty good. More wise than unwise." We sat at a canal-side restaurant in Venice, just after sunset—living pleasurably goes with being a successful art dealer. I asked her, "How about 'tough'?" She said, "I don't agree." Pause. "People always say that about women in the art world." I pursued: "Shy?" "I don't know. People say that." (A colleague once remarked that Goodman is the only person he knows who backs away while saying "hello.") She stands five feet high. Her often wary brown eyes peer out beneath dark, girlish curls. She has the softest of New York-accented voices. She appears to retreat even when delighted, ducking her head and grinning to herself. Her conspicuous self-effacement suits a line of work that rewards discretion. It combines with her prestige—Goodman may be the most respected contemporary dealer in New York, for her taste, standards, and loyalty to her artists—to generate a formidably enigmatic air. "Ah, the queen of us all!" the dealer Friedrich Petzel remarked when I told him that I was writing about her. A less enchanted peer, requesting anonymity, grumped that Goodman is "not collegial." (Royalty is so standoffish.) What is Goodman's realm, and what sets her high in it?

In popular culture, the gallery owner is a stock figure of slinky charlatanry, or worse. If a dealer makes the news, it's usually for being accused of tax evasion, money laundering, estate tampering, or some other offense that, in an arcane cash business, may be temptingly easy to commit. When that happens, people savor the cynical rush of discovering garden-variety greed behind a pose of lofty, intimidating sophistication. But there's no getting around the fact that refined sensibility—the real thing, with or without a garnish of pretensions—is indispensable to selling art. In this line, even crooks need taste. An art work is a unique, usually handmade physical object, worthless in itself, around which ideas propagate and dreams are spun. Its value isn't only subjective; it is subjectivity incarnate and portable.

Art dealers operate in a way that is confusingly indirect. Other entrepreneurs of creative production visibly cash in at the point where consumption either occurs (movies, performances) or is made possible (books, recordings). Only art galleries provide a full experience of their goods, free, to a drop-in public that is only fractionally, if at all, a clientele. (Serious collectors don't wait for shows to make their purchases; they might have bare walls if they did.) It's not that gallery owners are unusually philanthropic. To have anything to sell, they must accommodate their artists' will to glory by putting on shows, with advertising budgets, public openings, and perhaps glossy catalogues, with introductions by hired critics. Money changes hands out of sight, in negotiations that turn on the relative clout of the dealer and the collector. Buyers and prices paid are almost never announced. The standard dealer's commission on sales—fifty per cent—reflects the complexity of a gallery's services to its artists: agent and manager in one, publicist, archivist, sometimes assistant producer, and perhaps social director and lay psychotherapist. Dealers help to aim their artists' ambition at obscure bull's-eyes in the culture. Repeated hits earn a dealer a reputation for being a magus or a mountebank, depending on who's talking.

Goodman opened the Marian Goodman Gallery on East Fifty-seventh Street in 1977. (In 1981, she moved it to its present quarters, at 24 West Fifty-seventh Street.) True to the fanatical secrecy of her tribe, Goodman won't speak of revenues. "We do well," is all she would tell me. Walter Robinson, an art-world veteran who edits the online *Artnet Magazine*, estimates Goodman's annual gross to be in the low eight figures. (According to the Art Dealers Association of America, a trade group, fine art generates between five billion and ten billion dollars a year, worldwide.) Goodman handles leading foreign artists, including the painter Gerhard Richter, the photographer Thomas Struth, the sculptor Thomas Schütte, and the mixed-media documenter Lothar Baumgarten, of Germany; the sculptors Tony Cragg and Richard Deacon and the video artists Steve McQueen and Tacita Dean, of England; the installation-makers Christian Boltanski and Annette Messager, the filmmaker Chantal Ackerman, the site-specific painter Niele Toroni, and the digital animator Pierre Huyghe, of France; the Mexican aesthetic gamesman Gabriel Orozco; the sculptor and provocateur Maurizio Cattelan and the *arte povera* worthies Giuseppe Penone and Giovanni Anselmo, of Italy; the Canadian creator of staged light-box photographs Jeff Wall; the Irish maker of gnomic slide shows James Coleman; the Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra; and the South African film animator and puppeteer William Kentridge. Goodman represents Americans, too, including the sculptor Dan Graham and the conceptualists Lawrence Weiner and, since 1999, John Baldessari—taking the Californian master of photographic montage from the gallery of her oldest competitor, the estimable Ileana Sonnabend.

The Goodman is less prominent than the PaceWildenstein and Gagosian galleries, but its existence gives the art world rare jolts of self-esteem. Though bright and welcoming—with rest rooms that Weiner friskily labelled "We" (formerly "Them") and "Us"—the place emanates integrity. It's a palimpsestic effect of years of shows that, if they erred, did so on the side of high-minded rigor. The gallery occupies the entire fourth floor of its building. Two large rooms, at either end of a long corridor, are congenial to two-person shows or to munificent solos. (Richter always shows in both rooms.) Three or four times a year, on average, a window in the front room is popped out, and works that are too big for the freight elevator are winched up from the street—a costly, nail-biting operation that Goodman incurs by stubbornly refusing to join the nearly total exodus of leading New York galleries to the practicable former garages and warehouses of Chelsea. Goodman's taste is firmly rooted in the late nineteen-sixties and the seventies, when strong Europeans, having assimilated the lessons of American Pop art and minimalism, began to erode the creative centrality of New York. That was the last era of idealistic avant-gardes, whose ethical cachet—disciplined contravention of established values—still overshadows contemporary art's wandering present state. Goodman's identification with that tradition gives her a pick of ambitious, lively newcomers who extend and refresh it, such as Cattelan, Orozco, and Dijkstra. Any artist's first show at the Goodman is automatically a big deal.

Goodman began life in New York City as Marian Geller, the first child of an accountant and a schoolteacher. If she wasn't exactly a red-diaper baby, she was roseate. Her parents raised money for the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, and she summered at a camp in the Catskills that espoused socialist sentiments, folk music, and baseball. Goodman remains on the left—"a classic American liberal, in the best sense," her friend the radical German theorist and critic Benjamin H. D. Buchloh says. "Her judgment is ultimately aesthetic, but she has a broad understanding of what a privileged existence allows and requires one to do. Her gallery has a certain subtle social horizon of responsibility." Goodman's upbringing gave her a sense of belonging to a principled minority and, with it, a lifelong "fear of mob opinion," she said. She attended the Little Red Schoolhouse and Elisabeth Irwin High School. She was a star second baseman in high-school softball. "My friend was the shortstop," she told me. "Our idea was to look very girlie-girlie and to play the game very well." She added, in a tone of hard fact, "We were terrific." Indeed, there is something of an infielder's grounded equipoise about her, however dissimulated by the voluminous suits she wears by the designer Zoran. She graduated from Emerson College, in Boston, and planned to study journalism but was forestalled by marriage to William Goodman, a civil engineer. "It was before I grew up. I was twenty-one and had two kids right away." (Her son, Michael, is an industrial photographer in New York; her daughter, Amy, is a herbalist in Vermont.) Andrew Goodman, a son of her husband's brother, was one of the three civil-rights activists who were murdered in Mississippi in 1964. Goodman told me of Andrew's funeral, at the Ethical Culture Society, "Outside, the street was full of people. They were singing 'We Shall Overcome.'" At the memory, tears came to her eyes. She shook her head.

Marian Goodman's father, Maurice Geller, had a consuming passion for modern art. (His father, a Hungarian immigrant, was an unsuccessful painter who died before Marian was born.) Maurice had studied engineering but became a C.P.A. during the Depression to support his mother, three younger siblings, and his own growing household. He hated accounting, according to Goodman. In their apartment on Central Park West at Eighty-fifth Street, he mounted "art shows": posters and reproductions, cut from books and magazines, of Cézanne or van Gogh or another modern master, arrayed on the walls for the family's instruction. "I thought my father was mad," Goodman said. "But the way to spend time with him was to run after him to museums." Geller befriended Milton Avery, the superb American follower of Matisse, and at one point owned forty of his paintings—and almost none by anyone else. Living in the same building as the Goodmans were Sidney and Hansi Janis, who founded the influential Sidney Janis Gallery, specializing in modern and naïve art. They owned the great jungle painting "The Dream," by Henri Rousseau, which became a touchstone in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Goodman remembers playing out jungle fantasies in front of it, by the hour, in the Janises' living room with their sons, Carroll and Conrad (the actor).

Starting in 1963, Goodman attended graduate school in art history at Columbia. She was the only woman in her class. “A teacher told me that I wasn’t the kind of person that museums and universities were looking for,” she said. She despised the classes: “Teachers with their backs turned to slides, droning on.” She said, “I almost quit because of the civil-rights movement—to do something socially useful, to go to law school. I wasn’t sure being an art historian was so useful.” Meanwhile, she was ignited by a studio course with an abstract painter named Peter Golfinopoulos—“a street guy, so alive. There was so much love there.” Golfinopoulos showed with Charles Egan, a dealer of Franz Kline and Josef Albers. Egan became a lasting inspiration to Goodman. “Charles was a W. C. Fields type. A great fan of James Joyce. He was obsessed with ‘Finnegans Wake.’ ” Goodman recounted a scene in which a major Chicago collector, whose wife had musical ambitions, expressed outrage at a show in Egan’s gallery of monochrome paintings by Robert Rauschenberg. Egan denounced the collector as a philistine. As the man beat a retreat, the impolitic dealer shouted after him, “And your wife is a lousy violinist!” Such remarks must gestate at times behind Goodman’s bashful mien. Coping with the amateur public is a trial to her, precisely because she lacks any armor of snobbery.

“As a gallerist, it is your unpleasant duty to be friendly to everyone,” Thomas Struth remarked to me from his studio in Düsseldorf. “Marian is polite, but somehow she always manages to hold her own ground.” (Struth said that when she first visited him, in 1989, “I made a test.” He handed her a stack of fifty of his photographs and asked her to select ten. “She looked slowly and picked the best.”) “She is one of the most powerful and influential dealers of the twentieth century,” the director of the Dia Art Foundation, Michael Govan, says. “Of all of them, she has the least publicly visible presence. She is shy externally, but she has very intense individual relationships with her artists. She has an incredible stable. All her artists are among the most respected in the world, though with some exceptions, like Richter, of course, they may not be the most commercially viable.” Goodman spends “three or four hours a day,” she said, chatting on the phone with her far-flung artists—who, Weiner told me, constitute a “clan” like those of no other gallery. Her professional hero is the late Leo Castelli, contemporary art’s king in the nineteen-sixties and seventies. “I knew him really well. I was moved by his love of art and generosity with artists. His ethical stature. His warmth. I think of other gallerists who did a brilliant job, but they aren’t my idols.”

Around 1962, Goodman organized a portfolio of cheap photo-offset prints by New York painters—Avery, Kline, Stuart Davis—as part of a fund drive for the now defunct Walden School, which her children attended. It went well. “I thought, Maybe I could do this for a living,” she said. She needed a job. Her marriage was tottering. It was the sixties. “It all looked like freedom to me.” While Goodman did not become actively feminist, she said, “I saw those doors opening and I wanted to walk through.” Living apart from her husband, she was threatened with eviction from her co-op for entertaining gentlemen callers. (That was the second of three apartments on Central Park West, where, but for a spell on Riverside Drive, she has spent her life. She moved to her present top-floor apartment in 1973.) In 1964, Goodman proposed a nonprofit publishing project to the Museum of Modern Art; she was turned down. Printmaking was burgeoning in the sixties, responding to a soaring market and to an aesthetic sizzle provided by Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, and other innovative artists. In 1965—with five thousand dollars that she made by selling a Milton Avery painting her father had given her (he approved of the sale) and with partners including her friend Barbara Kulicke, the wife of the dominant frame-maker of the sixties, Robert Kulicke—she opened Multiples on Madison Avenue, near the Whitney Museum. Multiples published prints and manufactured editions of art objects, such as plastic abstractions by Barnett Newman and cloisonné pins by Roy Lichtenstein. For Goodman, prints had political appeal: art for the many. Her course was irreversible by the time disillusionment set in. “It turned out that the people who buy prints are the same people who buy everything else,” she said ruefully. She recalls her shock at discovering, in the late sixties, that the Lichtenstein pins that she was selling for twenty-five dollars apiece were fetching eight times that in Europe. Speculative frenzy was a new wrinkle in contemporary art. Goodman is convincing in her distaste for it, though she has certainly profited from price surges in the past decade, especially with Richter’s works.

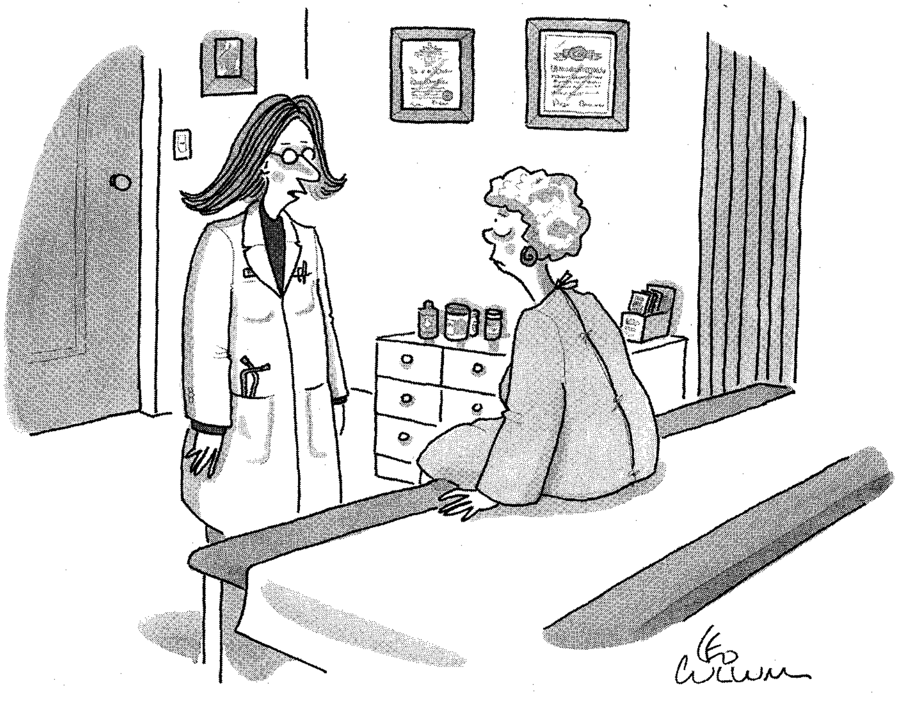
In 1968—the year of her divorce and a time when “New York was so insular; for the critics, the sun rose and set on American art”—Goodman had an epiphany in West Germany, when she visited the international art show Documenta, in Kassel. She said, “Like a lot of people in New York, I swore that I would never set foot in Germany. I was offended by people who bought Volkswagens. When I got there, of course, I looked at the older generation and wondered about what they did in the war. But the younger people were very mature. They had to judge their parents and to make their own values. They got right into the business of life. They didn’t have the luxury of contemplating their navels.” She saw a filmed performance by the ravaged, charismatic ex-Luftwaffe pilot Joseph Beuys, “moving gigantic planks of wood around” in a way that, for her, evoked the burden of the past. “I thought it was wonderful, though I had a lot of doubts about Beuys.” Artists of a leftist bent whom she began to meet and venerate, especially the sly and acrid Belgian conceptualist Marcel Broodthaers, disparaged Beuys’s authoritarian and megalomaniacal tendencies. Strains of conservative nostalgia and anarchic animus were at war in Germanic culture and, eerily, within the souls of individual artists, such as Richter and Sigmar Polke, who together, in the early sixties, hatched the brilliant German variant of Pop art, which they dubbed “Capitalist Realism.” For years, Richter showed in New York with Sperone West-water Fischer, a three-person partnership that included the serious-minded German dealer Konrad Fischer. After Fischer departed—partly in protest against a new emphasis on fashionable Italian neo-Expressionists like Enzo Cucchi and Sandro Chia—Richter showed jointly with that gallery and Goodman from 1985 until 1990. He then opted for Goodman.

After 1968, Goodman began frequenting art events in Europe. She had a success at the Basel Art Fair in 1970 with an edition of Andy Warhol's "Mao" prints—candy-colored icons of the totalitarian sublime, which, for one reason or another, nearly everybody liked. But she got nowhere in New York with her enthusiasm for European avant-gardists. MOMA rejected Goodman again, when she tried to interest one of its curators in Broodthaers. The art market tumbled in the recession of the early seventies, and her Multiples partners fell away. In 1974, she found herself in business alone, working from her apartment. She stayed up nights, she said, trying to think of tasks for her sole assistant, a young, dauntingly efficient German woman. Goodman was at loose ends personally, "rehabilitating my life." Her frustrated wish to promote Broodthaers was decisive. She started a gallery, which opened on a tragic note. Shortly before the inaugural Broodthaers show, the artist died of liver failure, at fifty-two. (Broodthaers's twisty, cerebral art—including elegant installations of, say, common objects in vitrines, eighteenth-century engravings, ironic texts, and the odd palm tree, concerned with protocols and politics of exhibition—is still a hard sell in America.) Other early offerings of the gallery were shows of the piquant German abstract painter Blinky Palermo and the dandyish, esoteric American sculptor and performer James Lee Byars.

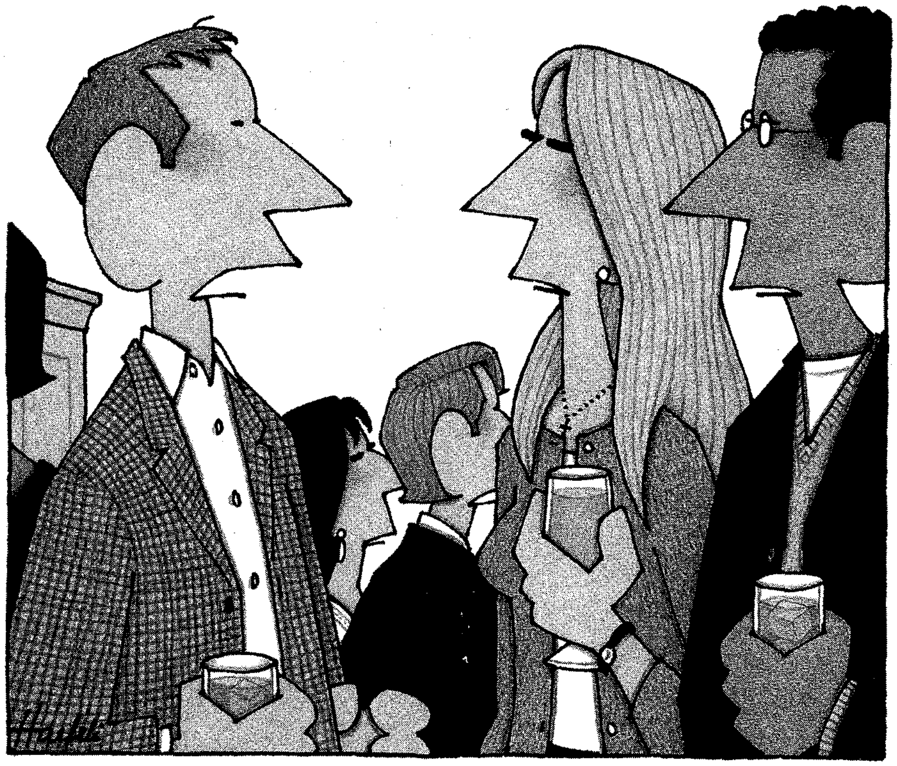
Goodman kept company in the seventies with a trial lawyer, who brought some lawyer friends to an opening where Byars held forth in a gilded tent. Goodman recalled, "James Lee shouted, 'Hear the phi-to-infa!'—something about philosophy—'and it will knock you down!' Then he would jump up in the air and flop on the floor. He must have been black-and-blue the next day." The lawyers politely thanked Goodman for the evening. "I think they were puzzled." She smiled contentedly at the memory. I asked her if such culture shocks were frequent among her non-art-world friends and family. She said they were, and promised to provide anecdotes, but later she begged off. She said, "There are many funny stories, but I've realized that almost all of them are at someone's expense. I don't feel right about telling them." Accordingly, she declined to talk about the most colorful contretemps in her gallery's history, which, as luck would have it, unfolded in the public eye.

Goodman worked closely with Anselm Kiefer for seventeen years, starting soon after she met him, at the 1980 Venice Biennale. It was an auspicious relationship, for her and for contemporary art. Kiefer's grand, darkly ironic works on mythic and political themes, including disasters of the Third Reich, revived painting's long-dormant potency as a medium of historical imagination. Having started her gallery for Broodthaers, she moved it to a bigger space so that she could show Kiefer's often colossal works. The arrangement began to sour after a huge, disastrous dinner party in Greenwich Village, in May, 1993. The gala was the reclusive German's hubristic idea of a New York social début. His new companion (and present wife), Renate Graf, who had met him while working for Goodman, made the arrangements. Kiefer's sense of timing—the art world was in a foul mood, beset by a crashing market and a hangover from the scene-making frenzy of the eighties—proved lamentable. Guests were kept waiting for what I recall as the better part of an hour, standing in a dark room. Then we were admitted to a murky industrial loft that was tricked out with candelabra and white veil scrims, with white sand on the floor. Mimes in whiteface, including drag queens dressed as brides, performed non-stop. The fare ran to recherché organ meats, such as bull testicles. "It's funny," the artist Sherrie Levine (who showed with Goodman for a time) mused aloud. "I always thought I could eat anything." Did Kiefer's departure from the gallery, a few years later, stem from his grumpiness at the fiasco? One persistent rumor has it that he was angered by Goodman's lukewarm response to some new work by him. She said only, "We went in different directions." Pause. "I admire him immensely." Kiefer has since shown with Gagosian.

The Kiefer evening notwithstanding, Goodman is celebrated, among friends of the gallery, for the buffet dinners that she has hosted at her apartment after openings. For years, she did the



"Many women are more at ease with a female doctor. That's why I'm wearing the wig."



"I don't belong to an organized religion. My religious beliefs are way too disorganized."

• •

cooking herself. Among her oldest and best friends is Diana Kennedy, the doyenne of Mexican cuisine for the English-speaking world. (On holiday with Kennedy in Chiapas, in 1994, she was awakened one morning by the furor that announced the Zapatista movement to the world.) Goodman travels often, almost always by herself, to take in shows, to cultivate relationships with curators and other art-world people of influence, and, particularly, to see her artists. Visiting them is "like tending a garden," she said. I tagged along on a trip to Cologne last summer when she called on Gerhard Richter at his studio. They met in 1983, at the high tide of the neo-Expressionist craze, in which the astringent and brainy Richter did not figure. Having briefly shown European stars of the moment like Georg Baselitz and Markus Lupertz, Goodman decided that both her heart and art's future belonged not with them but with Richter, who was still little regarded in America. He welcomed her overture, he told me, because of his dismay at the course of fashion: "New York was looking in the wrong direction!"

Richter later told me that, when Goodman visited him for the first time, "it was a hard forty minutes. I am not a good speaker, not an entertainer. Marian is the same. Each of us sat in front of the other and didn't know what to talk about. At last I said I was sorry, I had to work. I was a little bit angry at myself, for being so stupid." It took me a moment to register that he told the story in praise of Goodman. "I was impressed that she came alone. Other dealers come with another person or an entourage to support them." He added, "Marian is a presence. She is wise. She has courage." (He gave the last word its French pronunciation.) True to his account, he and Goodman talked little when I was with them, but their enjoyment of each other was palpable. They did a spot of business about a series of eight different-sized sheets of thick safety glass bracketed to the wall—works meant to be reflected on, in both senses. Dapper and gracious, Richter sketched and numbered them on a piece of paper. Some were already committed to a collection or an exhibition, and Richter would keep two. Two others were set aside for Goodman, if she wanted them. She did. She pointed to another pencilled oblong on the paper and said that she had a buyer for that work who would give it to a museum. "Poor museum!" Richter said. He showed us his new abstract paintings. The first was a large canvas bearing a uniform grid of small skeletal spheres—derived from an electron-microscope photograph of silicate—in fuzzy grisaille: a cold, dizzying picture with an optical vibration and almost an audible buzz. Three other paintings progressively effaced and warmed up the pattern with painterly and atmospheric effects. "It's getting more free," Goodman remarked. Richter nodded. We looked at the lovely, difficult works in relaxed silence.

A few days later, Goodman arrived in Venice to revisit the Biennale for a long look, undistracted by the mobs that had attended its opening. The show's all but exclusive emphasis on young artists troubled her. "Group shows are better with a sense of context," she said. "I realize that everybody is supposed to know the art of the last thirty-five years, but it's important that it be seen. If you put together a show of artists from the sixties and seventies, they are all survivors. With young artists, who survives is still to be determined." This led her into mild complaints about the present art world. "It's always the same cycle, since the eighties. Young people get a great deal of attention. Those in mid-career have a harder time. When they are much older, they may be reëmbraced." (This recalls F. Scott Fitzgerald's lament that there are no second acts in American lives, with the addendum that there may be a third act if you persevere and have somebody to stand by you.) "I wish there were more sense of balance. The way the art world treats new art has nothing to do with the reality of the situation. I wish we could replace it with more long-term interest in the artist over the span of his life." Among those artists who were highly praised at the Biennale was Gabriel Orozco, for his elaborate, haunting re-creation, in wood, of a rapturously modernistic concrete portico, designed by the architect Carlo Scarpa in 1952, which still stands, badly deteriorated, in a neglected garden of the Italian pavilion. The most highly praised young artist was the Albanian Anri Sala, represented by a lyrical documentary film on the mayor of Tirana, who, to raise public morale amidst economic devastation, had arranged for the city's buildings to be painted in brilliant primary colors. Goodman plans to work with Sala.

Today, the Goodman Gallery employs seventeen people full-time in New York and four at a branch in Paris. Goodman scouts new talent, but cautiously, lest she disrupt the standards and tone that her regular artists set for the gallery. The artists themselves have influence when it comes to deciding who will or won't join their crew; more than one candidate has been blackballed. She listens to advice. Her friend Benjamin Buchloh alerted her to Struth and Orozco, but she has rejected other of his recommendations. She agonizes when selecting an artist. She said, "The choice of whom to work with goes to one's spiritual core. It starts with intuition, but it's important to reflect on how deep a commitment one feels before one gets involved. One must be willing to keep showing an artist for fifteen or twenty years. The worst thing in the world is to grab someone before one is convinced. It's so devastating if you lose interest." Careful to a fault at times, Goodman regrets having passed up a chance at the Belgian painter Luc Tuymans in the early nineties, deciding that he was a pale epigone of Richter. She now agrees that Tuymans's tenderly brushed meditations on banal imagery take aspects of Richter's painting to a new plane.

Goodman could save money and gain vastly more visibility by relocating to Chelsea. She has looked into the possibility, she said, but, like some of her European artists, she is chary of that hive of spaces. (The bimonthly guide *Chelseart* lists more than two hundred galleries, over half of them clustered on four blocks.) "They all look alike. People forget which gallery they are in," she said. A quarter-century ago, she was almost alone among top gallerists in shunning SoHo, whose boomtown ways repelled her. "I saw dealers running after artists, then throwing them out and going on to the next. I was afraid it was contagious." Relatively isolated, her gallery is less a showplace than a base for managing artists' careers. "The most exciting thing for me is working on museum shows," she said. Helping the curators of such shows by facilitating arrangements with artists and collectors "makes me very happy." She ticked off a number that are in the works: Cattelan in London, Baumgarten in Dallas, Huyghe in Fort Worth, Orozco at the Hirshhorn in Washington, Penone at the Pompidou, and Baldessari, Dijkstra, and Kentridge with touring shows in Europe. McQueen has been in Iraq, photographing, as the official artist of the Imperial War Museum. Goodman looked forward with relish to having massive sculptures by Cragg hoisted up from Fifty-seventh Street for a December opening (the show of abstractions, in bronze, marble, stainless steel, fibreglass and Kevlar, was an almost dauntingly majestic affair), to be followed by shows of Baumgarten, Kentridge, and Wall.

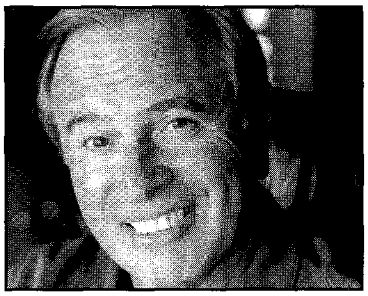
What would Goodman do if she weren't dealing? "Maybe teaching art somewhere, maybe in Mexico," she said. "But no. I wouldn't really. I'm a fighter. I would go down with my ship." Pause. "I hate endings. I will do absolutely anything to prevent them." In truth, Goodman without her gallery is as hard to imagine as a sea captain in Wyoming. "Gallerist" is the word she prefers for herself; she dislikes "dealer." What's the difference? She couldn't exactly say. Perhaps she, too, is spooked by the shadiness that clings to her profession. (On the subject of business ethics, I asked her about the practice of skirting sales taxes on cash transactions. "Never," she said. Pause. "I don't think dealers do that anymore." I said I thought that some did. She said, "I like to sleep at night.") But the French-sounding "gallerist" signals something else, as well: an old-fashioned cosmopolitan ethos, for which the Atlantic Ocean is a lake shared by aspirants to transnational culture. New York City used to symbolize that. It still does, chez Goodman. ♦

WE DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT DEPT.

From the Contra Costa (Calif.) Times.

Marin officials say the birds are a huge nuisance. They eat acorns that would be new oaks, push other species aside in the fight for food, and scare hikers and bikers during their mating season.

Columnist and Author
Ken Auletta
In Depth



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ANNALS OF ENTERTAINMENT

THE SURVIVOR

Hollywood's king of schlock.

BY AMY WALLACE

In 1998, a script entitled "Phone Booth" started making the rounds in Hollywood. It had a simple premise: a smarmy New York City publicist picks up a ringing pay phone and learns that a sniper will kill him if he hangs up. The story, which takes place entirely in and around a booth on Fifty-third Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, was seductively "high-concept," meaning that you could explain it in a sentence or less. Such scripts are relatively easy to sell to moviegoers, which is why Tom Cruise's production company flirted with buying it, and why Twentieth Century Fox paid seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars to take it off the table. Steven Spielberg briefly considered directing it, as did Mel Gibson, who also planned to star. Michael Bay, the king of blow-it-up cinema, was in line for the director's job, and then the Hughes brothers were. Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino, and Robin Williams were interested in starring, but the studio wanted to go younger, so Will Smith came aboard. After he dropped out, Jim Carrey stepped in, with Joel Schumacher as director. Then Carrey took a pass.

Larry Cohen could have been a Brian De Palma. He's not, but he works more.

ZOHAR LAZAR

All this was difficult for the screenwriter, Larry Cohen, to watch. So as A-list actors and directors came and went, offering suggestions for rewrites, Cohen—who is more of a B-movie man—dealt with his frustration by doing something that has soothed him since he was a teen-ager. He wrote another script.

In 1999, as "Phone Booth" continued to linger in development, Cohen sold his new script, "Cellular," for nine hundred thousand dollars. "Cellular" is "Phone Booth" turned inside out. It's the story of a man who answers his cell phone and hears a woman say that a kidnapper will kill her if he hangs up. "Phone Booth" is a guy on a phone stuck in one place trying to save himself; "Cellular" is a guy on a phone running all over the place trying to save someone else. As far as Cohen was concerned, the two scripts were completely different. Fox executives disagreed.

"I was furious at Larry," Elizabeth Gabler, the president of Fox 2000, says. She called Cohen after reading the script for "Cellular," which was eventually sold to Dean Devlin, the producer and co-screenwriter of "Godzilla." Devlin had a development deal at Sony Pictures. "I said, 'What were you thinking? It's exactly the same idea.' "

Even Cohen's mother heard the echo. "She said to him, 'Larry, enough with the telephones,' " Cohen's sister, Ronni Chasen, a well-known Hollywood publicist, says. Gabler, meanwhile, alerted Fox's lawyers, who threatened to sue. They exacted a promise from the producers of "Cellular" that "Phone Booth" could be released first, and it was, last year. Today, Cohen still doesn't see why everyone got so worked up.

"So I'm in my phone phase—so what?" he says. "I want to do a phone trilogy, so that the people who write about movies and review them will think, Oh, that's a Larry Cohen script," he explains. "Now if anyone sees a telephone in a movie, they'll know it's mine."

Hollywood is a place where wunderkinder are so prized that even twenty-eight-year-olds try to pass for younger, and people with any history—a writing credit from a hit TV show like "M*A*S*H," a birth date before 1980, or even a slight familiarity with "Father of the Bride" (the one that didn't star Steve Martin)—usually take pains to hide it. When you work in the entertainment industry, Botox isn't just about vanity; it's about parity.

This is part of what makes Larry Cohen a puzzling figure: he has been in the business for nearly half a century. Forty-eight years ago, when he was seventeen, he sold his first script, to NBC's "Kraft Television Theatre." Today, he is sixty-five and a grandfather. Not that he looks it: he has a full head of hair that he tints a sandy blond, and his five-foot-ten-and-a-half-inch frame is lean. Twice a week, he and his personal trainer climb the steep trails that crisscross the Santa Monica Mountains above Beverly Hills, where he lives, often while listening to tapes of Abbott and Costello's classic radio show.

"Any writer in Hollywood who's working past the age of forty is inspiring—let alone past the age of sixty," says Andrew Kevin Walker, thirty-nine, one of many screenwriters (he wrote the thrillers "Se7en" and "8mm") who are fans of Cohen's earlier films. One of Walker's first jobs in the industry was as a production assistant on a Cohen film. "His stuff is incredibly energetic and overreaching," Walker says. "There's a lot of P. T. Barnum in him."

There are screenwriters who have decent careers selling scripts that never get made, and there are even writers who are ghly sought after, yet end up with only two or three screen credits. Here, too, Cohen is an anomaly: he has written or directed (or both) more than a hundred motion pictures, television shows, and stage plays. His body of work includes the nineties whodunit "Guilty As Sin" (in which Rebecca DeMornay defends Don Johnson, who may or may not have killed his wife), the eighties Mob thriller "Best Seller" (in which Brian Dennehy writes the life story of a hit man, James Woods), the seventies blaxploitation classic "Black Caesar" (in which Fred Williamson is a Harlem crime lord), and the sixties Western "Return of the Seven" (in which Yul Brynner is magnificent—again). Before that, Cohen wrote and created network TV shows that often delved into controversial issues (homosexuality, euthanasia, "un-American" activities, movie censorship). Since childhood, when he made his first 8-mm. movie, about spies and stolen microfilm, Cohen has been a geyser of ideas both cheesy and profound.

Mostly, people have relegated his movies—typically made on the fly, with meagre budgets—to the schlock pile. Cohen hasn't always disagreed. "You've got to hush some of them up, you know," he says, when reference is made to "Maniac Cop," a 1988 horror flick that was marketed under the slogan "You have the right to remain silent. Forever." But he has just had a very good year. "Phone Booth," which was made, with Colin Farrell, for just twelve million dollars, grossed forty-six million at the domestic box office, and millions more from video and DVD sales. Three hard-to-find movies have just been released on DVD: "Bone," "Q: The Winged Serpent," and "God Told Me To." And this past fall "Cellular" was made, with a name star (Kim Basinger), a solid budget (thirty-five million), and a major distributor (New Line Cinema); it's scheduled for release later this year. Cohen has three more scripts ready to sell, one of which he's hoping to direct—something he hasn't done since 1996.

"Traditionally, careers in show business run out of steam," he says. "But I just keep turning scripts out. Some people, they stop. Even people who've had huge successes for years find themselves unemployed, going to film festivals and being told how great they are—but nobody's giving them a job. It's better to be me, who never got all that. I'm still working." Cohen is referring to something that's both a privilege and a predicament: he has avoided becoming a has-been, in part, because he never fully *was*.

When Cohen is writing a screenplay, there are certain things he will not do. He will not rely on an outline. Over the years, he has found that organization and planning make his stories fall flat. He will not drive a car. Once, in the late sixties, he became so distracted by thinking about a script-in-progress that he drove his Lincoln Continental the wrong way up a one-way street. He will not use a computer.

"Oh, no," Cohen says on being asked if he owns a laptop. "When I write, I'm watching the movie in my head, imagining it. I want to be in it. I don't like to see the words that I'm writing." Instead, he usually dictates his scripts into a hand-held tape recorder. He often does this as he wanders around the eighty-seven-hundred-square-foot Spanish-style house that he shares with his second wife, Cynthia Costas Cohen, a psychotherapist and sculptor. The house, which has high-ceilinged rooms and is surrounded by sloping lawns, is situated in Coldwater Canyon, a secluded area north of Sunset Boulevard. It was built in 1929 by William Randolph Hearst, and used to be owned by Samuel Fuller, the genre director of the fifties and sixties. (Fuller was a good friend of Cohen's, and even acted in his 1987 vampire picture, "A Return to Salem's Lot.") It's not Xanadu, but it's so grand and sprawling that Cohen has used it to film scenes in fifteen of the twenty movies he has produced himself. Sometimes, he will begin dictating a script as he walks around the swimming pool, where he floated a dead rat in "Bone." Sometimes, he'll climb the stairs to the bedroom that served as the mutant baby's nursery in "It's Alive!" Until the moment he pushes "record" and starts to talk, he doesn't know much about the story

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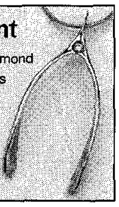

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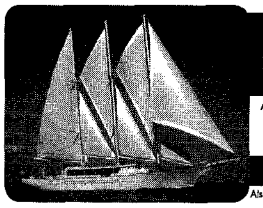

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he's telling. Then, suddenly, he does.

"The people around him cease to exist during that moment," says his first wife, Janelle Webb Towey, who collaborated on many of the films Cohen wrote, directed, and produced under his own banner, Larco Productions. "He just goes bye-bye. His eyes glaze over, and he's in a world of his own that he's creating. He walks around with that little tape-recorder thing, talking. He's all the characters. He speaks in their voices. His whole body gets into the act."

"The best stuff, I don't remember writing," Cohen maintains. "The subconscious just takes over." His subconscious generally fills up both sides of a ninety-minute cassette, which his conscious self then pays a typist to turn into about twenty-five pages. With "a fix-up here, a fix-up there—but surprisingly very little," he says, five good writing days can yield a finished screenplay. Each year, he offers as many as six of these completed (or "spec") scripts for sale to the highest bidder.

Most profit-minded studio executives would rather market a movie with a one-hook plot—a man racing to defuse a bomb implanted in his own body, say, or a housewife who bumps her head and remembers she was once a secret agent—than try to sell a literary adaptation like "The Hours." This plays to Cohen's strengths. "He thinks up really simple, strong premises," Lauren Lloyd, a former executive vice-president at Sony Pictures, who is one of the producers of "Cellular," says. "There's no setup. On page 2, you already know what the issue is and what's going on."

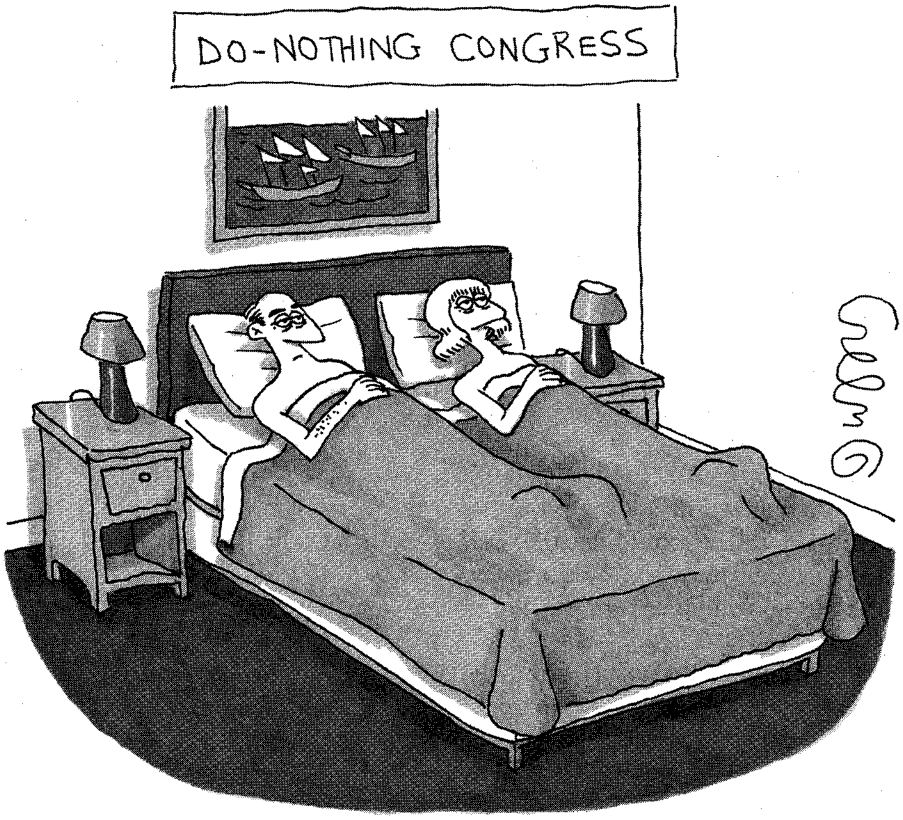
"It's the core idea of Larry's films I find so intriguing," says Michael Dougherty, a twenty-nine-year-old screenwriter (he has a credit on "X2," the "X-Men" sequel) who has been a Cohen fan since childhood, when he discovered "It's Alive!" on cable. "They always start off with reality—our world—and he just adds one little tiny twist: What if a family had been wanting to have a child and finally does, but it's this mutated cannibalistic creature?" (The 1974 horror flick was so successful that Cohen went on to write and direct two sequels, "It Lives Again" and "It's Alive III: Island of the Alive.")

Cohen is a lifelong Hitchcock fan. As a young man growing up in New York City, he sneaked into the Plaza hotel to watch Hitchcock shoot Cary Grant being kidnapped in "North by Northwest." A decade later, Cohen met Hitchcock at the St. Regis to pitch him a script—"Daddy's Gone A-Hunting"—about a mentally disturbed man stalking a former lover who, years before, aborted their child. Hitchcock liked it but eventually passed, and the script, which Cohen co-wrote with Lorenzo Semple, Jr., went to the director Mark Robson ("The Harder They Fall," "Peyton Place"). "He did a terrible job," Cohen recounts. "That's what finally made me want to direct movies. My wife said, 'This is just too depressing for you to have a wonderful script ruined like that.' So I said, 'O.K., let's try something small, like 'Bone.' And that's how it all began."

"Bone"—a 1972 satire about a working-class black man who becomes entangled in the lives of the wealthy white couple he's trying to rob—had only three key characters, and Cohen shot the film for just eighty-five thousand dollars. But, from the start, when Bone (played by Yaphet Kotto) appears ominously beside a Beverly Hills pool, viewers were on notice that big issues were in play. The film is daring, both in its editing and in its dialogue. ("Don't call me names, lady," Kotto tells the woman at one point. "I'm just a big black buck doing what's expected of him.") Thirty years later, its portrayal of liberals trying to mask their prejudices still resonates.

To Cohen's dismay, "Bone" was marketed as a blaxploitation picture, with posters that blared "Tougher Than Shaft! Meaner Than Superfly!" It did not do well. Cohen's second film, however, was a hit. He made "Black Caesar" for Samuel Z. Arkoff, of American International Pictures, the prime purveyor of exploitation cinema. Arkoff had seen "Bone," and decided that Cohen had a knack with black actors. Cohen dusted off a story he'd written for Sammy Davis, Jr., about a gangster who rises to power but loses his soul along the way. The movie, modelled on the 1931 classic "Little Caesar," was shot in just eighteen days, with a budget of four hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

For Cohen, there's some irony in its success. "Bone" was the more ambitious picture. It failed, at least in part, because it was marketed as if it were a movie like, well, "Black Caesar." " 'Bone' was way ahead of its time," Cohen says today. "If that picture had received the kind of critical response it really de-



served—if I'd gotten some real heat out of it—my whole career would have been different. I don't know if it would have been better or worse, but it would have been different."

Growing up in the forties and fifties, Cohen lived with his parents—and, after the age of thirteen, his baby sister, Ronni—in a small first-floor apartment in Inwood. Cohen's father, Irving, was an amateur photographer who spent weekends locked in the family's one bathroom, developing pictures. Weekdays, though, he collected rent from half a dozen apartment buildings he owned in Harlem. He hated his job. "But he had the belief that you cannot make a living doing anything you enjoy," Cohen says. Cohen's mother, Carolyn, by contrast, took joy in everything. The daughter of a Jewish vaudevillian who was a minstrel on the Orpheum circuit, she was a movie buff who encouraged her son's fascination with Hollywood. "She'd see every movie and then come home and tell me the plot," Cohen recalls. "I'd say, 'What was it about, Mom?' And she'd tell me 'Key Largo' or 'Double Indemnity.' She could tell you a whole movie in five minutes, without leaving anything out."

From the beginning, Cohen's mother played a key role in his career. After Cohen graduated from City College and enlisted in the Army, he was offered a writing job on a TV series, "The Defenders," starring E. G. Marshall and Robert Reed as a father-and-son legal team. Cohen, then in his twenties, was stationed at Fort Eustice, in Virginia, and was impossible to reach. So his agent called his mother about his fee. "The agent wanted to turn the offer down because he thought the money wasn't good enough," Cohen's sister recalls. "Our mother knew it was an important job and she told the agent, 'Take it.' "

Cohen's love of New York City can be seen in the way he memorializes its landmarks. Over the years, his films have depicted a fistfight at the ice-skating rink at Rockefeller Center, the beheading of a window washer on the eighty-eighth floor of the Empire State Building, and the printing of newspapers in the basement of the New York Times Building (Cohen got in and shot until he was ejected by security guards). Once, he had the actor Billy Dee Williams making an escape on the Staten Island Ferry.

Cohen is fond of saying that he can't walk more than a few blocks in Manhattan without seeing a location he rented, borrowed, or stole for one of his films. One Saturday, he agreed to test that assertion. For hours he traversed the island, pointing out alleyways, rooftops, water towers, balconies, stairways, and street corners where he rolled cameras, usually without permission and with skeleton crews. At the intersection of Fifty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, several movies competed for his attention. One was "God Told Me To," released in 1976, about a police detective who, in the course of investigating a series of murders, discovers that his sibling is a hermaphrodite deity. (Cohen claims that he was inspired by America's emerging gay culture.) At one point during the filming, Cohen had the comedian Andy Kaufman impersonate a police officer and join the St. Patrick's Day parade as it marched down Fifth Avenue. Luckily for Kaufman, by the time he pulled a fake gun out of his pocket and started firing into the crowd, a few of the five thousand actual police officers marching around him had been let in on the plot.

"I'm holding them back, saying, 'He's an actor, not a cop,' " Cohen said giddily. "I kept him from being killed." It was a windy afternoon, and Cohen was wearing an untucked Ralph Lauren T-shirt and chinos, and, with his strong chin, prominent nose, and neatly trimmed eyebrows, he resembled Danny Kaye at sixty-something. He pointed to the northeast. "Right across the street there, under the Louis Vuitton sign, we shot a scene from 'The Ambulance,' " he said, recalling a 1990 thriller about a sinister emergency vehicle that rescues New Yorkers, then takes them to their doom. "Eric Roberts meets Janine Turner, she collapses, and the ambulance comes and picks her up right where that tree is."

At Fifty-seventh and Second, Cohen admired the Excelsior, the apartment building where his mother lived in the sixties and seventies. Her apartment was on the twenty-first floor, and when he was shooting "Black Caesar" he had Fred Williamson throw several of her

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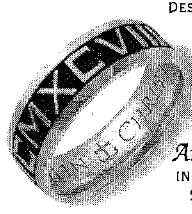

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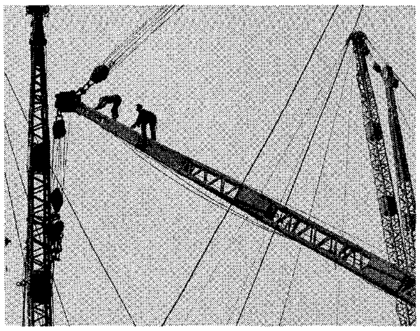

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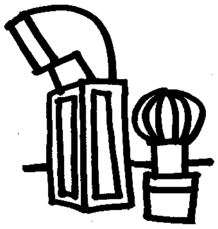
fur coats off the balcony. “I was afraid that one of the coats would land on top of a taxicab and drive off into the city with my mother looking out the window, screaming,” Cohen says. He walked a few blocks to the south and west, where he could picture Williamson emerging from Tiffany’s only to be shot down in the street. “There used to be an office building here and on the fifth floor was a former agent of mine who used to let me shoot out the window,” he recalled. “The cameraman thought I was insane. When he showed up, he said, ‘Where’s the crew?’ I said, ‘You’re the crew. We’ll never get this scene if we have a bunch of people. We have to shoot it like it’s really happening.’ ”

Williamson laughs when reminded of the shoot. “He put me in some very precarious situations,” he says, recalling how in the sequel, “Hell Up in Harlem,” Cohen had him climb a rickety scaffolding to the top of a building in Times Square. “I said, ‘Instead of standing down here imagining stuff, you go up there, tell me what it looks like, and when you come down, then I’ll go up.” Cohen started climbing.

“It was skin-of-your-teeth filmmaking,” Michael Moriarty, the actor best known for his stint as Ben Stone, the Assistant D.A. on TV’s “Law & Order,” says. Moriarty appeared in four Cohen films, including “Q,” in which he plays Jimmy Quinn, a small-time crook who discovers a gigantic flying lizard nesting atop the Chrysler Building. (Think “King Kong” with wings.) “Larry tends occasionally not to look ahead. But genius is what you do with the mistakes, and nobody was better with mistakes than Larry Cohen.”



During the filming of “Q,” in 1981, Cohen had permission to shoot only on the first level of the Chrysler Building’s spire. He took his crew—and Moriarty—all the way to the top. In one scene, lawmen, perched in cages on the outside of the building, fired machine guns loaded with blanks, and spent cartridges rained down on the streets below. Hearing the gunfire, passersby thought a sniper was terrorizing the city. “HORROR MOVIE STIRS UP A REAL SCARE,” the *Post* reported.

As Cohen hiked around a city he calls “my own back lot,” the associations kept coming to him. Late in the day, he arrived in front of the Chrysler Building. “Look at that,” he said, cocking his head toward the sky. “Every time I look up at that building, I feel it belongs to me.” Then he strode through the Art Deco doorway, pushed past a velvet rope, and headed assertively toward the elevator.

“Hello!” a security guard barked.

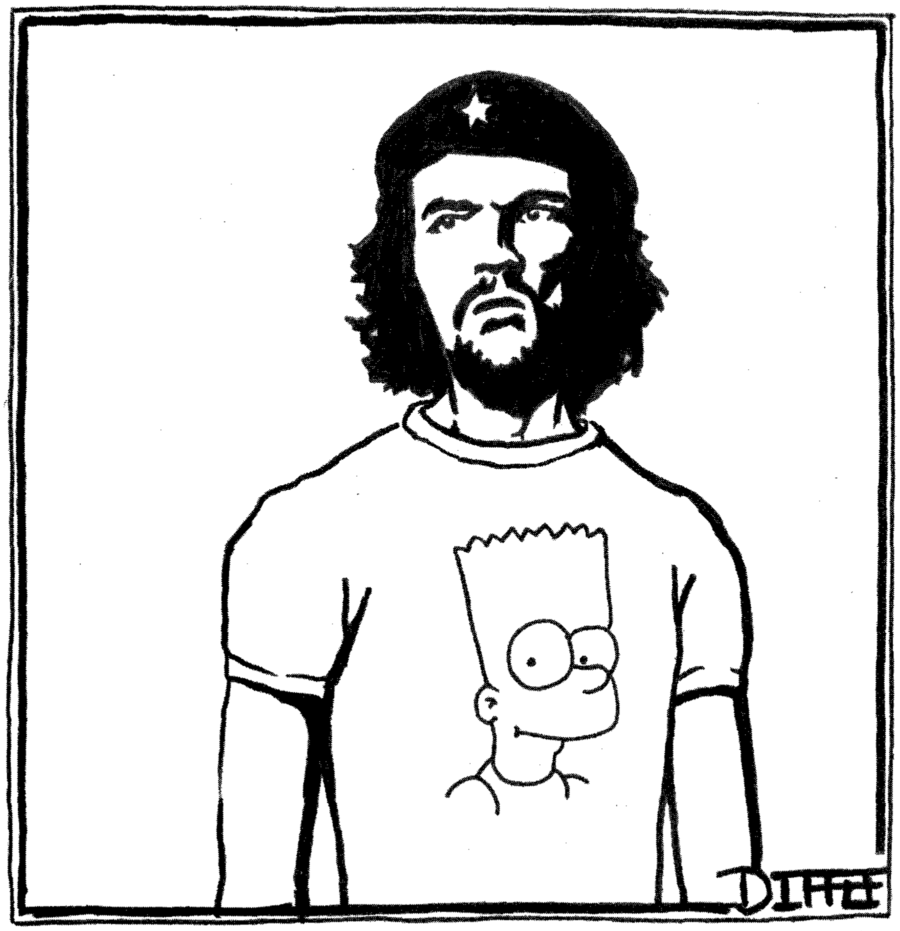
“We’re being thwarted,” Cohen whispered. He turned to the guard. “How you doing?” he said, all charm. “I filmed a movie here years ago. You ever seen it? ‘Q’—about the big bird that lives up there?” Cohen pointed upward. The security man looked blank.

“It’s a movie,” Cohen continued, gamely. “About a nest up there. David Carradine was in it? You never saw this movie?” The guard shook his head. Cohen didn’t get upstairs.

Not long ago, Cohen arrived at the Walt Disney Studios lot in Burbank to pitch Matt Gross, an executive producer who has a development deal with Touchstone Television, a division of Disney, which also owns ABC. Cohen knew Gross from a cable movie they made together in the mid-nineties called “As Good As Dead,” about a woman who loses her identity after she lends her insurance card to a sick friend, who impersonates her, then dies on the operating table. Cohen was wearing a black T-shirt and slacks, a beige linen jacket with the sleeves rolled up, a clunky chrome Tag Heuer watch, and expensive tan lace-ups that made his feet look narrow and elegant. He carried no notes, no talking points.

Nearly thirty years had elapsed since Cohen created his last dramatic show, “Griff,” which starred Lorne Greene as a Los Angeles police captain turned private eye. Now he’d decided to try to get a new series on the air. “TV people always want somebody who’s doing movies,” he said. “Phone Booth” made it a good time to be out pitching.

“Larry is the king of high-concept,” said Gross, who wore bluejeans, a red plaid Western shirt with snap buttons, black Prada loafers, and white socks. He shook Cohen’s hand. “Anytime he’s got an idea, I want to listen.” Cohen didn’t



have one idea; he had four. "Con Job" was about a petty hoodlum who is wrongly convicted of a crime, wins a ten-million-dollar judgment from the state, and devotes his life to helping others imprisoned for crimes they didn't commit. "The Victim" was a sci-fi detective drama about a crime solver who is possessed by the spirits of people who have been murdered. Next was a supernatural drama about a clinic where witches, werewolves, vampires, and extraterrestrials go when they're feeling under the weather.

" 'ER' meets 'Men in Black,' " Gross said, holding out a bowl of Hershey's miniatures.

"I wish I'd said that," Cohen replied. His final idea was about a former heavyweight champion who solves crimes. The twist: everyone thinks the Champ is invincible, but, in truth, his final fight injured his skull so seriously that the next punch he takes will be fatal. When Cohen told this story, his right foot started to pump, as if working an accelerator.

"It's a perfect Disney show—a total family show," Cohen said, warming to his subject. "The best thing about Superman is kryptonite. If it wasn't for kryptonite, Superman would be the most boring fuck that ever lived. So the Champ is vulnerable. Everybody thinks that he can handle any situation, but we know that he can't." Cohen had even thought about casting. "All you've got to do is negotiate a good enough deal with Michael Clarke Duncan," he said, referring to the beefy African-American actor whose movie roles have never moved beyond prison inmates and gangster bosses. He had already been in touch with Duncan's manager. He added, "Our position should be that this will give Michael the stardom that will always elude him in features because he's not going to make it as a top banana in the movies."

Gross leaned forward, scribbling on a yellow legal pad. "I like it," he said. "I love it. It's great. What are you calling it again?"

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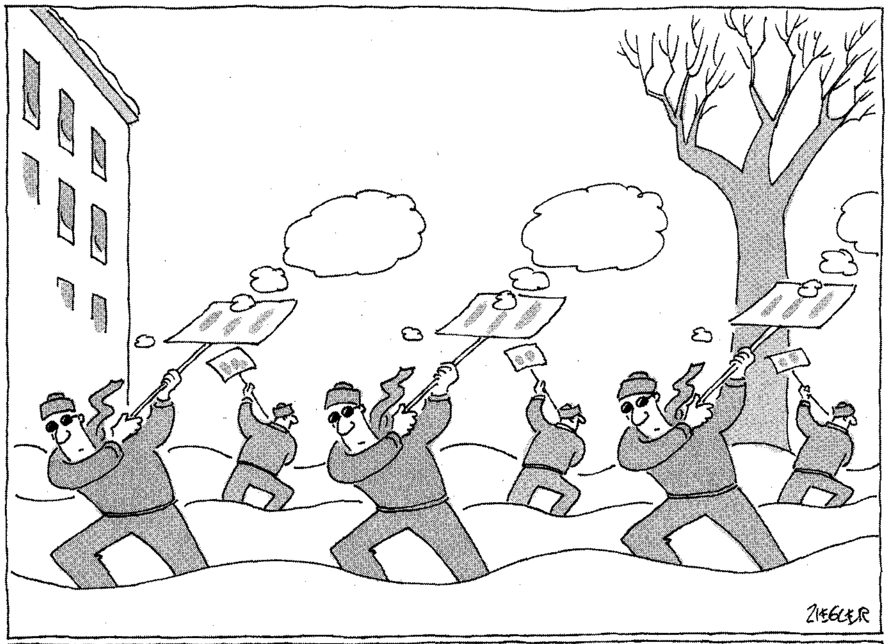
" 'The Champ,' " Cohen said.

" 'The Champ,' " Gross repeated. "That's the first thing we'll change."

Over the years, the quality of Cohen's movies has been the focus of some debate, mostly in the alternative press. Writing about "Q" in the *Village Voice*, J. Hoberman compared Cohen to Fuller, his more celebrated friend, saying that the film gave more expression to "the delirious tabloid quality of American life than any film since 'The Naked Kiss.' " Seth Cagin, of the *SoHo News*, writing about Cohen's 1977 political biography, "The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover," noted that "few films—or works in other media, for that matter—so intelligently grasp the true, grimy nature of the American political beast." Still, these assessments are self-consciously against the grain. Part of the difficulty of evaluating Cohen's films is that they smuggle sophisticated (and often political) ideas inside the goofiest scenarios. "The Stuff," for example, a 1985 horror movie, is about a frozen-yogurt-like goo that turns people who eat it into zombies. (The tag line: "Are you eating it or is it eating you?") All the same, some critics saw it as a satire of American materialism; one scholar declared it "one of the few radical films that emerged during the Reagan era."

Among Cohen's champions is the British film historian Robin Wood, whose 1986 book "Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan" compares Cohen's "characteristically odd, subversive, inventive, and marvelously acted" films favorably with those of more commercially successful directors like Brian De Palma. Cohen, unlike De Palma, "remained obstinately true to himself . . . at the cost of virtual obliteration," Wood wrote. Lately, some have even wondered whether Cohen is intentionally self-destructive. Last September, as his sister was lobbying Twentieth Century Fox to shell out the money to create an Oscar campaign for Cohen's "Phone Booth" screenplay, Cohen sued the studio for a hundred million dollars, claiming that it had ripped him off on another project. The studio launched no Oscar campaign. (Cohen, being Cohen, did it himself.)

Still, Wood and others have argued that Cohen's audacity and the tossed-off quality of his work are strangely linked to his greatness. When "Phone Booth" was released, the *Times* movie critic Elvis Mitchell wrote a paean to Cohen, whom he called "a born showman" with a "mastery of the paranoid premise." The critic praised the "grungy bravura" of Cohen's irreverent films and TV shows, singling out several, like the 1965 series "Branded," that commented on the blacklist. "Branded" featured an eighteen-eighties cavalryman (Chuck Connors) who, unjustly court-martialled for cowardice, travels the Old West trying to restore his good name. "Mr. Cohen has mined a career out of one simple question—what's the worst that could happen?" Mitchell wrote. "Even when the projects aren't great, the ideas that fire them are."



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Cohen can be pleasantly surprised by praise, but he seems almost impervious to criticism. As his sister says, "Larry really loves his work, and if other people don't like it, he always thinks that they're stupid, not that they're right. That's the beauty of him. He believes he's right."

In his breakfast room, Cohen has posted a list on the wall. "Unsold Screenplays," it says in block letters. There are eleven titles—"Anonymous Call," "Bad Deeds," "Captivity," "A Conjugal Visit," "A Cruel and Unusual Punishment," "Fallen Eagle," "Innocence," "Momentum," "Movie House," "Optical Illusion," and "Wisecrack." Some of these won't be on that shelf for long. "Man Alive"—in which a fugitive tries to save the life of his alleged murder victim—was sold to a major production company last year and is in development. "Captivity," about a beautiful model and a nerd who are kidnapped and chained together, has been making the rounds to potential buyers.

Recently, Cohen completed the third script in his telephone trilogy, "Messages Deleted." It's about a guy who comes home one night to find a message on his answering machine from someone who is about to be murdered. Then he receives a message from another victim. And another. The mystery unfolds. Those who read it will enjoy, at least, this inside joke: the main character teaches screenwriting at the New School, and has never sold a script in his life.

"So many things that are very good get turned down," Cohen says, lamenting that the young people whom studios pay to do "coverage"—or summaries—of spec scripts often subscribe to rigid formulas about what a screenplay is. "If a script reader reads something that doesn't fulfill that structure, then it's immediately a 'bad' screenplay and has to be rejected. Once that report goes into the computer, it's always going to haunt you." Unless, of course, you change the name of the script and resubmit it. Cohen does this occasionally. "The chances are that the script reader won't be there anymore," he says. "Chances are that all the executives will be gone.

"It may take eight or ten years, but you'd be surprised, when you look back, how almost everything gets sold," he says. "Sometimes they get made, sometimes they don't. But if I write the script I've had the fun of making the movie in my head, without interference. No one can take that away from you."

If Cohen were to write a script about his own life, it might go like this: A man yearns for glory and doesn't get it. The hook: He ends up better off. Cohen is currently finishing a script called "The Man Whose Prayers Were Answered"—about a man who is persecuted for having a direct line to God. A script about Cohen could be called "The Man Whose Prayers Weren't Answered." It would have a happy ending.

Cohen knows what he has missed. If things had been different, he says, "I would have been directing Jack Nicholson instead of Michael Moriarty. And that's what it's all about in Hollywood. If you direct big stars, then you're a big director." De Palma, he says, "got what I thought I was going to get, or hoped to get." But Cohen made a great many more movies. "I was making one picture after the other, turning out a few movies a year, a couple of scripts a year. I wanted to be more like the directors in the old Hollywood who worked continually. I figured if you hang in there for the long haul doing what you want to do, maybe someday someone will pay attention."

Apparently, Cohen has hung in there long enough. During the past few years, there have been retrospectives of his work at the New York Shakespeare Festival and at the Art Institute of Chicago. His films are being studied by college students as far away as Northumbria University, in England. There a professor named Elayne Chaplin, whose Ph.D. dissertation was titled "Boys, Men and Monsters: Masculinity in the Films of Larry Cohen," spends a week each semester teaching "God Told Me To." That film and "Q" screened as a double feature this summer at the American Cinematheque at the Egyptian Theatre, in Hollywood. Cohen was invited to speak, and when he walked into the lobby he was swarmed by admirers. "I'm anxious to get back to work every day," he told the crowd inside. "I write because I have to. Because I want to know what's going to happen next."

Recently, Cohen got back the remake rights to "It's Alive!," from Warner Bros. He has written an updated script, augmenting the original movie's enduring themes of parenthood and alienation with more modern twists: fertility drugs, artificial insemination, genetic manipulation. He would like to direct this one himself, and, because the original was set in Los Angeles, he thinks the remake should unfold in Manhattan. Instead of L.A.'s storm drains, which figured prominently in the original, Cohen would love to shoot in the subway tunnels—one of the rare New York landmarks he has yet to immortalize on film. "Even I wouldn't go in there without permission," he says. "I don't want to get run over by a train."

Joel Schumacher ended up directing "Phone Booth" on a street in Los Angeles that was outfitted to look like Manhattan. Cohen says that Schumacher did a good job, but that he can't stop his brain from unspooling the version he would have made himself. He would have shot on location, and he knows precisely where: on the southwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-fourth Street.

During his recent visit to New York, he stopped to get his bearings in front of the Playpen, a strip club on that corner. "That's where I wanted to put the phone booth—right there," he said, pointing to the spot he had imagined when he wrote the first script of his telephone trilogy. Over his head, a red neon sign flashed "Checks Cashed." A twenty-five-cent peep show was just down the block.

"Look how great everything looks," he said, holding his palms up and extending both thumbs, framing the shot. "It's a great wide street. You've got a lot of cars and taxis going by. You could put cameras in those windows up there"—he pointed north, to the Milford Plaza Hotel, as a bus zoomed by, blowing its horn. "That's what I'm talking about," he said, his eyes glistening. "It would have been noisier than hell." He laughed. "Yeah," he said. "I'll just make 'Phone Booth' over again. I'll call it 'Kiosk.' It'll be *really* low budget." ♦

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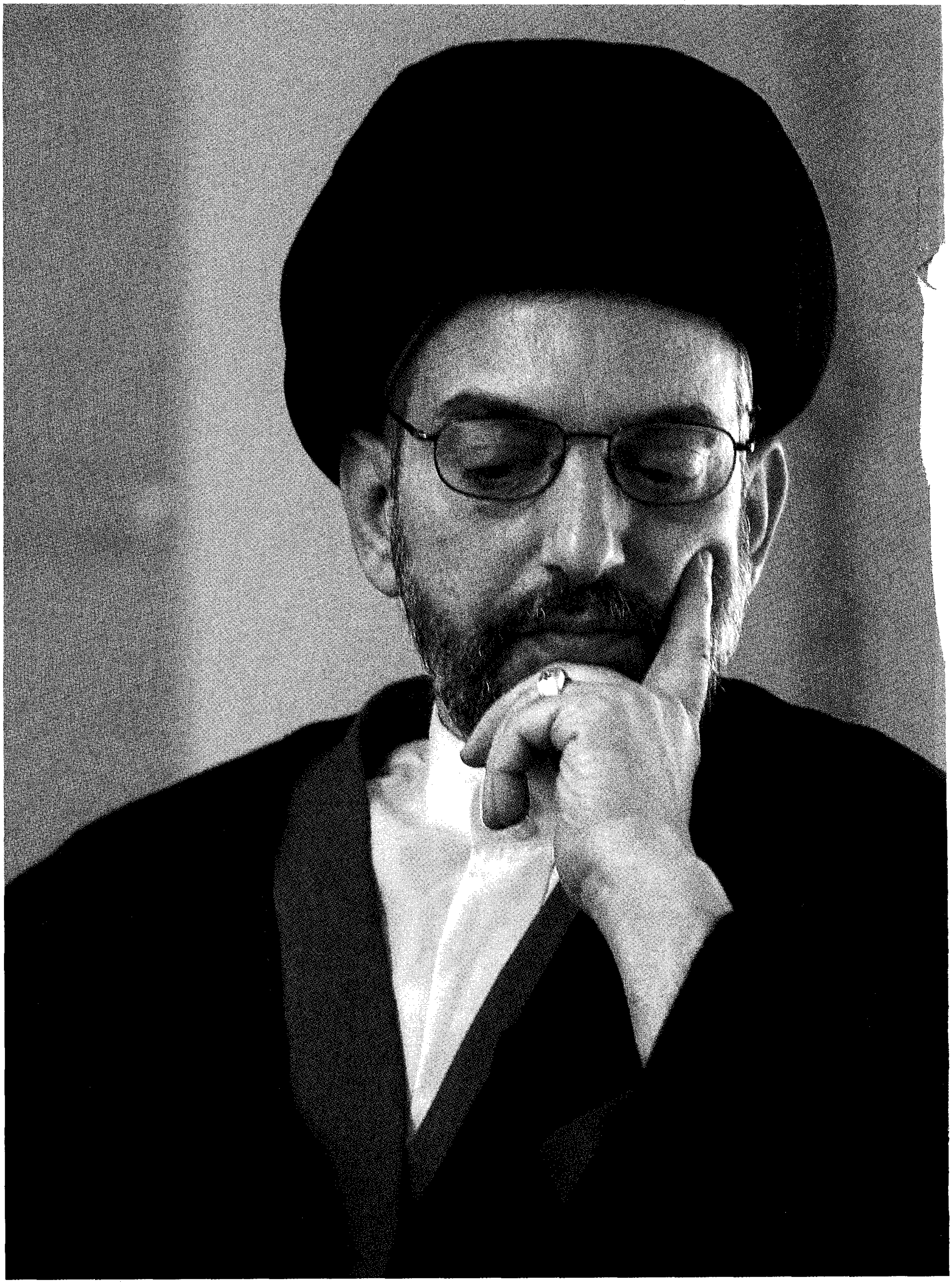
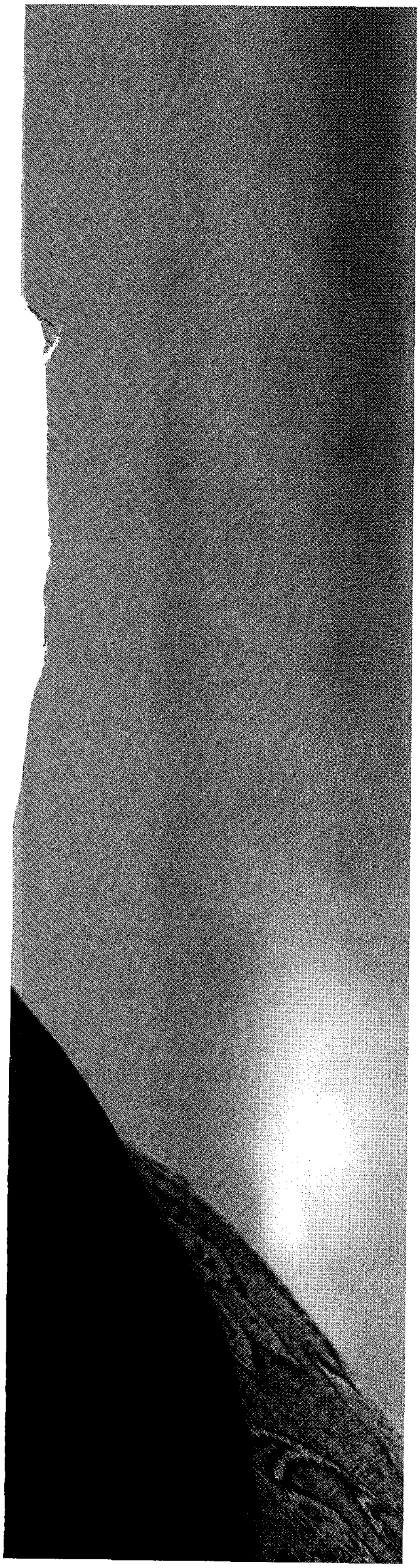


Abdulaziz al-Hakim is a Shiite with impeccable religious credentials, a loyal militia, and a recent history of coöperation with the Unite



tates. Photographs by Samantha Appleton.

LETTER FROM IRAQ

THE CANDIDATE

The scion of a famous Shiite family says that, if elected, he can run Iraq.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Tariq Aziz, who was once Saddam Hussein's most visible emissary, lived in a big brick villa in Baghdad, on an embankment above the Tigris River with a sweeping view of the water and date-palm orchards on the other side. Many of his neighbors were also senior members of Saddam's regime, or Saddam's relatives. The Jadiriyah palace complex, which belonged to Saddam's family, is a few hundred yards away. The Aziz house is sprawling and grand, with a swimming pool in the back yard, but it is curiously situated—much too close to the ugly concrete pillars of the Jadiriyah bridge, which looms over it. The ground around the pillars is untended now and full of garbage and rubble, and visiting the house after dark is spooky. To get onto the riverside drive, you have to go down an unlit road that runs between the pillars and then under the ramparts of the bridge. It seemed to me a perfect spot for ambushes, and the bridge an ideal location from which to lob rocket-propelled grenades.

Tariq Aziz is incarcerated with other leading members of Saddam's government—and perhaps even Saddam—in a prison run by the United States near the Baghdad airport, and his house is now the residence of the leader of the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI, the largest and best-organized Shiite group in the country. Before the war, members of SCIRI were hunted down and tortured and killed or imprisoned. Its leaders were based in the Iranian cities of Tehran and Qom, and its fighters operated out of secret camps along the Iran-Iraq border.

Assuming that some kind of elections will be held in Iraq this year, Abdulaziz al-Hakim, who became the head of SCIRI after his brother Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim, was assassinated, in August, stands a good chance of becoming Iraq's next President—if he survives that long. A few days before I last visited Hakim, in early December, someone had fired a rocket at him while he was visiting a mosque.

Hakim is married and has four children. When he returned to Iraq earlier this year, after two decades of exile in Iran, his family stayed in Qom, but they are with him now, in the Tariq Aziz house. His aides work downstairs, in austere rooms furnished with desks and chairs and not much else. The floor of one of the rooms is covered with a big carpet, and they sit on it and share meals, and then sleep on the carpet when their work is done. The upstairs rooms, where Hakim meets guests, are decorated in a style that is popular in Iraq. The carpets are faux Persian, the chairs are plush and thronelike, and the couches have baroquely carved gilt backs. I was taken to a room dominated by a large conference table, where Hakim was presiding over a sort of graduation ceremony for young people who had done well in a workshop called "Loyalty and Support."

Hakim, who was dressed in the black turban and gray robe of a Shiite cleric, was at the head of the table, in front of a microphone, speaking to perhaps two dozen young Iraqi men and one woman. The woman was seated toward the back, in a chair pushed up against a wall. She appeared to be in her twenties, and wore a full-length skirt and a head scarf. Hakim was giving them a pep talk about how the Shia were at a juncture in history that was as important as the one they had experienced in 1920, after the Arab revolt against the British colonialists, which, he said, had led to a series of political decisions that determined the way Iraq has been ruled since then, and to the continued oppression of the Shia.

The oppression of the Shia in Iraq extends back at least to 1638, when an Ottoman sultan captured Baghdad. Shiism had been established as the state religion of neighboring Persia in the sixteenth century, and the Sunni Ottomans

A BLESSING FROM MY SIXTEEN YEARS' SON

I have this son who assembled inside me
during Hurricane Gloria. In a flash, he appeared,
in a heartbeat. Outside, pines toppled.

Phone lines snapped and hissed like cobras.
Inside, he was a raw pearl: microscopic, luminous.
Look at the muscled obelisk of him now

pawing through the icebox for more grapes.
Sixteen years and not a bone broken,
not a single stitch. By his age,

I was marked more ways, and small.
He's a slouching six foot three,
with implausible blue eyes, which settle

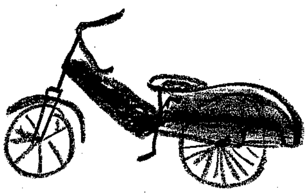
on the pages of Emerson's "Self-Reliance"
with profound belligerence.
A girl with a navel ring

could make his cell phone go *brr*,
or an Afro'd boy leaning on a mop at Taco Bell—
creatures strange as dragons or eels.

Balanced on a kitchen stool, each gives counsel
arcane as any oracle's. Bruce claims school
is harshing my mellow. Case longs to date

and the Shia had fought over the Mesopotamian provinces for a hundred years. The Ottomans maintained control until the First World War, and even though more than half the population embraced Shiism, Sunnis were politically dominant. The British upheld this tradition soon after they established the state of Iraq, in 1920. They installed a Sunni Hashemite king, Faisal. Following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958, political power remained in Sunni hands, with few exceptions, until Saddam Hussein was toppled in April.

"People will be looking to you as their leaders," Hakim said to the earnest young Shiites who had excelled in the course on loyalty. "We have already made a large step forward, with the establishment of the Governing Council"—the twenty-five-member Iraqi administrative body set up by the Coalition Provisional Authority last summer—"which my late brother Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim, may peace be upon him, approved. But it is now up to the rest of us to take the next steps, so that the democratic majority of Iraq"—i.e., the Shiites—"can take their place in the society in which they have been treated as second-class citizens for nearly fourteen hundred years." He was counting from 661 A.D., when Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and, according to the Shia, his rightful successor, was assassinated. "It was the late Ayatollah's great wish that this be the case," Hakim said. Then everyone stood up, and Hakim handed out diplomas to the three top graduates. The first two were young men who inclined their heads to kiss his hand as he murmured words of praise. The third was the woman. She approached Hakim and prostrated herself on the floor at his feet. The men in the room clucked their tongues in disapproval at this display, and Hakim beckoned to her to rise. He handed her a diploma, but then she fell to the ground again, and the men in the room clucked their tongues again. She got up, her face flushed, and Hakim told her that she was an admirable example of Shia womanhood. He smiled, waved his arm in a salute, and he and his bodyguards swept out of the room.



The aide who was accompanying me suggested that I watch Hakim give an interview to Al Arabiya television, and we waited while the TV crew set up the equipment and Hakim's minions fiddled around, adjusting the furniture and putting plastic flowers on tea tables. Hakim sat in front of a curtain and addressed questions about rumors that he had been killed and spoke of how important it was that the authority to govern the country be given to Iraqis and that they establish a constitution.

The Iraqi Interim Governing Council has a rotating presidency that changes every month, and it was Hakim's turn to be president in December, when the most pressing issue facing the council was how to reconcile the conflicting demands of the United States and the Shia clergy about electing a provisional government.

Another big issue was how to deal with the deteriorating security situation in Iraq. Hakim doesn't think foreign troops are necessary. "Organizations that have resisted the regime for decades are represented on the council," he told the Al Arabiya interviewer. "We have, for instance, the Badr organization." The Badr organization, the military wing of SCIRI, was formed in 1983, shortly after Abdulaziz al-Hakim and his brother went into exile in Iran. It was called the Badr Brigade then. Brigade members were trained by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and fought on Iran's side in the Iran-Iraq War. Both SCIRI and the brigade were supported by the Iranian government. In 1991, immediately after the Gulf War, when Shiites in the south participated in an uprising against Saddam's regime, the Badr Brigade briefly occupied Basra and carried out reprisals against the Baathists there. "They have the organization and the experience to deal with security," Hakim said. He tried to put to rest the spectre of a Lebanon-style civil war that many Iraqis, espe-

a tattooed girl, because he wants a woman
willing to do stuff she'll regret.
They've come to lead my son

into his broadening spiral.
Someday soon, the tether
will snap. I birthed my own mom

into oblivion. The night my son smashed
the car fender, then rode home
in the rain-streaked cop car, he asked, *Did you*

and Dad screw up so much?
He'd let me tuck him in,
my grandmother's wedding quilt

from 1912 drawn to his goateed chin. *Don't*
blame us, I said. *You're your own*
idiot now. At which he grinned.

The cop said the girl in the crimped Chevy
took it hard. He'd found my son
awkwardly holding her in the canted headlights,

where he'd draped his own coat
over her shaking shoulders. *My fault*,
he'd confessed right off.

Nice kid, said the cop.

—*Mary Karr*

cially Sunnis, bring up whenever the Badr organization is discussed. "Once we have the constitution written, the militias can be incorporated into the national armed forces," he said, "and eventually we'd like to see an Iraq where even policemen don't carry guns on the street."

The night after Hakim was interviewed on Al Arabiya, I returned to the villa. Hakim sat in an ornate chair in one of the garishly furnished rooms upstairs, and I sat in one just like it, next to him. We were served Turkish coffee, and a bodyguard brought Hakim a lighter and cigarettes. (He smokes when he is not in public.) He was wearing the same cheap, rubber-soled, black slip-on shoes he had been wearing the day before. Hakim is not personally vain. His vestments are elegant, but not luxurious, which is only proper for one who is a sayyid, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and the scion of one of Iraq's oldest and most highly regarded Shia clerical families. The Hakims have special status as a family of martyrs. The members of the family who remained in Iraq in the eighties were treated with particular brutality by Saddam, and more than fifty were murdered.

Abdulaziz al-Hakim speaks in a patient monotone, and he never displays anger or irritation in public. He seems more like a priest, or a judge, than like a politician, although his role has always been political. His father, who died in 1970, was involved in the uprising against the British in the nineteen-twenties and was the leading spiritual authority in Iraq in the sixties, the head of the *hawza*, or center of learning, in Najaf. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani holds that position now. Abdulaziz's eldest brother was murdered in exile in Khartoum in 1988. The brother who was killed in August, Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim, was a religious scholar, although his decision to go to Iran, where he adopted Khomeini's brand of political Islam and sent his militia to fight against other Iraqis in the Iran-Iraq War, alienated many Iraqi Shiites, including some of his fellow-clerics. Abdulaziz was his brother's closest political aide, and he commanded the Badr Brigade.

In the nineties, after the Gulf War, the Hakims, their Iranian ties notwithstanding, regularly engaged in quiet talks with the United States. Hamid al-Bayati, their envoy in London, who is now with Abdulaziz in Baghdad, was their chief diplomat. SCIRI was among the organizations offered financial support by the United States Congress through the Iraqi Liberation Act, in 1998. The Hakims didn't take the money, but they continued to have cordial relations with the Clinton and then the Bush Administrations. In August, 2002, during the runup to the war in Iraq, Abdulaziz visited Washington, where he met with Vice-President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. The Hakims opposed the American invasion, since they had their own plans for regime change, but they made it clear that they wouldn't interfere. In February, a month before the war began, more than a thousand Badr fighters set up a base in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Pentagon was not pleased, and warned that if Badr men were found in the field with arms they would be regarded as a hostile force.

When the Hakim brothers returned to Iraq last spring, they adopted a policy of nonconfrontation with the Coalition forces, and that helped stabilize the Shia areas of southern Iraq. Abdulaziz took SCIRI's seat on the Governing Council and continued to handle most of the negotiations with the Americans. The Ayatollah resumed his life as a cleric in Najaf, officiating at Friday prayers at the shrine of Imam Ali. On August 29th, two car bombs were set off outside the shrine, killing the Ayatollah and at least eighty-five other people. It was the largest mass killing since the end of the war.

After his brother's assassination, Abdulaziz began to assert his political positions more openly and forcefully. He publicly blamed the Americans for the conditions in Iraq that made the assassination possible, and he brought out his Badr men in a show of force around Najaf. In October, after Israel bombed what it claimed was an Islamic Jihad training camp in Syria, Abdulaziz travelled to Damascus, where he met with Bashar al-Assad and announced that any attack by Israel against Syria would be considered an attack against Iraq. Abdulaziz also sided with Kurdish leaders in opposing the American plan to send Turkish forces to Iraq, effectively dooming it.

That night in Tariq Aziz's old mansion, Hakim said he was sorry that, because of "security conditions," he was unable to appear in public much anymore. "It's become difficult even to pray," he joked, referring to the recent rocket attack. One of his aides translated for us.

"Did you imagine, when we first met, that it would be like this?" I asked. We had spoken in Tehran, two months before the United States invaded Iraq. He replied that he had always said there would be problems if the Americans occupied the country: "The Iraqi people were not expecting that the U.S. would be here in this way. I wish that you had been with us when we first entered Iraq, and had seen how we managed to control many of the cities, to maintain security during those first days."

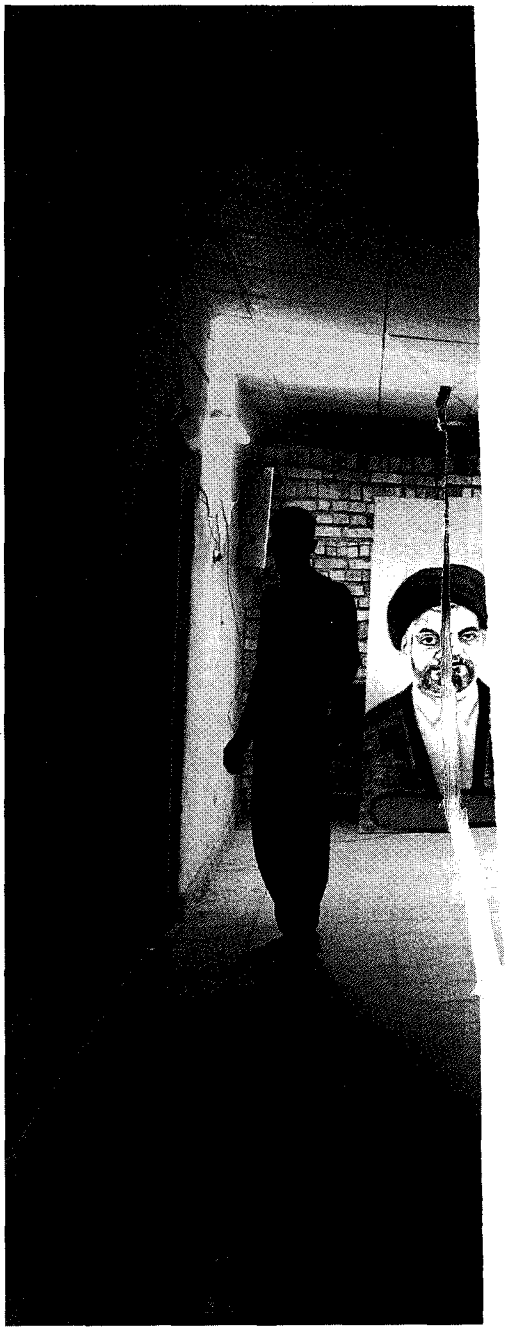
Hakim brought up the Badr organization again, claiming that a hundred thousand men had turned out on the streets last fall to mourn his brother. "These forces, their hands are tied," he said. "They are never given a chance to act." He said that he and several other Governing Council members—including Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, who is close to him—had offered their militias as an alternative to American soldiers. "All we have said is give us a chance," he said. "Why have more of your citizens killed if Iraqis are willing to do the job?"

Hakim said that Iraqis had two main problems with the Americans: "First, some of them have a picture of us that is not realistic, and, second, some of them do not understand the cultural and social behavior of the people in Iraq. There is a lack of knowledge about us." But, little by little, the Americans were beginning to see the light. "In our meetings with U.S. officials," he said, "many are finding that the reality is different from what they thought in the beginning." He stopped, and I thought I detected a smile.

The biggest worry that the United States has about the Iraqi Shiites is that they will turn out to be too much like the hard-line Iranian Shiites. The first George Bush had this in mind in 1991, when he didn't intervene to stop Saddam's slaughter of Shiites who rebelled after the Gulf War. SCIRI officials say that, while they are grateful to the Iranians for sheltering them and supporting them in the eighties and nineties, they are now independent of Tehran, and have scaled back their hopes for an Islamic revolution in Iraq. But Hakim certainly still has friendly links to Iran. In December, when he was the head of the Governing Council, he raised the issue of reparations for the Iran-Iraq War (Iran wants a hundred billion dollars), which he supports. Nevertheless, his proof of pragmatism and moderation is SCIRI's coöperation with the Coalition Provisional Authority. "If the Shiites wanted to, they could burn down the whole Middle East," a former Jordanian intelligence officer said to me recently. "But they will do that only if they feel threatened."

Despite the long history of hostility between the Sunni and the Shia, sectarianism has not been the central organizing force of Iraqi society in modern times. Until recently, most Iraqis would probably have identified themselves first by nationality or tribe, or by whether they live in an urban or a rural community, or by some ideological position that is not necessarily religious. But sectarian divisions were reinforced during Saddam's regime, because the Baathists persecuted political groups that were Shia, even if secondarily, and because the Shiites suffered most during Saddam's war with their co-religionists in Iran. In the nineteen-eighties, Saddam executed thousands of Shiites. Several hundred thousand more were accused of being ethnic "Persians" and were forcibly expelled to Iran.

Religion, in its institutional form, became even more important in the weeks following the fall of Saddam. There was a sudden vacuum of authority, and it was often filled by Shiite organizations that could handle practical matters while the Americans were muddling around, trying to get their bearings. Forces loyal to the radical young Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr quickly seized control of the huge slum in northeastern Baghdad known as Saddam City. They established vigilante control of the streets, took over hospitals, and renamed the place Sadr City, in honor of Moqtada's father, an ayatollah who was murdered, apparently on Saddam's orders, several years ago. They remain in de-facto control there today. The Mahdi Army, or God's Army, a young, ragtag, largely untrained group, further bolstered Sadr's power in parts of southern Iraq. And Hakim's Badr fighters moved in. They occupied several towns northeast of Baghdad, and battled Saddam loyalists for the town of Baquba. A contingent of American marines arrived in the area several weeks later and skirmished briefly with the Badr forces before they relin-



A painting of Abdulaziz al-Hakim and h

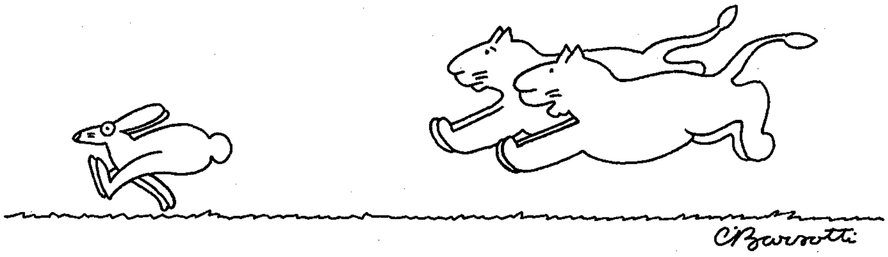
other, an ayatollah who was assassinated in Najaf last summer, hangs in the Faw headquarters of their militia, the Badr organization.

quished control of Baquba. Keeping a low profile, they remained in several other key towns along the border, in Baghdad, and in numerous communities in the south.

One of the largest contingents of the Badr Organization for Development and Reconstruction, which is the official name of Hakim's militia now, operates out of SCIRI headquarters in Basra, in the Coalition zone run by the British. A few days after I spoke to Hakim, I set out for Basra with a driver and translator, Salaam, under sodden gray skies. As we left Baghdad, we were caught in an hour-long traffic jam, next to two muddy S.U.V.s filled with armed American men in civilian clothes, presumably C.I.A. or Special Forces. Iraqi men and boys walked from car to car, selling bananas with Chiquita labels on them. We bought a bunch, and when I had eaten one Salaam took the banana peel and threw it out the window. "It's O.K., Mister Jon," he said. "This is the new Iraq." I looked down and saw banana peels everywhere.

We drove south for about six hours, and as we approached Basra, in the late afternoon, we saw a large truck on fire on the other side of the road, flames pouring out of its gutted carcass. Several men were running around the truck, looking agitated. A convoy of British soldiers passed at that moment and did not stop, and neither did we.

For centuries, visitors praised Basra's unique charm and beauty. The fourteenth-century Arab traveller Ibn Battutah wrote of the city's cosmopolitan ambience, its elegant courtyards and fruit gardens. That was a long time ago, but Basra managed to retain its allure well into the twentieth century. In the early nineteen-thirties, Freya Stark described it as a romantic oasis, nestled "under palm trees soft and woolly as green velvet," and, twenty years later, guidebooks to Iraq



“Naw, they’re not like us—they don’t feel pain.”

• •

still extolled Basra as the Venice of the East. No longer. Basra today is a vast slum, bereft of most of its trees; open spaces are strewn with garbage, and the most notable feature of the city center is a ditch coursing with raw sewage. The locals explain, poignantly, that Basra’s legendary groves of date palms were decimated in the Iran-Iraq War. The city was shelled repeatedly during that conflict, which lasted from 1980 to 1988, and it was bombed in the first Gulf War and then torn apart in the Shiite uprising that followed. For the next twelve years, Basra languished (along with the rest of Iraq) under U.N. sanctions. It was attacked periodically by American and British warplanes, and was further punished by a policy of intentional neglect by Saddam’s regime. During the war last spring, the city was bombed again, and there was some fighting between the British and Saddam’s forces there. Once the Baathist defenders were vanquished, Basra was looted by rampaging mobs.

The city has been more or less peaceful until recently, when tens of thousands of Shiites took to the streets to protest the Coalition’s election plans. Even so, there have been relatively few attacks against the British troops who are in charge there. The British are visible, but they maintain a more relaxed profile than their American counterparts farther north, normally travelling in small convoys of two or three vehicles, and often without helmets or even flak jackets. Under the surface, however, there is plenty of violence, most of it criminal. On my first night in the city, I heard gunfire, and went out to the small balcony of my hotel room to see what was going on. The city was virtually blacked out, its electricity supply being in even worse shape than Baghdad’s, but I could see some tracers arcing into the sky, and hear what sounded like a gun battle taking place about three blocks to my left. Then there was gunfire in the other direction, and a procession of cars came into view. Drivers were honking their horns and men were waving guns and shooting at random from open windows. It was, I realized, a wedding party.

The next morning, Salaam investigated the mysterious nocturnal firefight and came back with a confusing story about a tribal clan avenging the killing of one of its members, a robber, by a security guard. The clan had been shooting up the neighborhood, he said, and several people were killed. A little later that morning, as I was standing on the street talking on a satellite phone to my wife in England, I watched three or four gunmen from one of Basra’s Islamic militias enter a house nearby, evidently looking for a former Baathist official. I heard a shot, and the gunmen left with the official’s brother, having decided to kidnap him. A crowd of people gathered around the house, and three British military vehicles drove slowly past, but no one got out to investigate.

The SCIRI headquarters in Basra are on a blocked-off lane in a neighborhood of large, gaudy, marble-clad mansionettes. SCIRI occupies a house that belonged to a Baathist official who fled the city when the British moved in. The house is guarded by a number of young men with automatic weapons, and they wouldn’t let me near the place until I telephoned Baghdad and got one of Abdulaziz al-Hakim’s aides on the line. He explained to the guards that I was a guest of His Eminence, as Hakim is known to his followers, and they allowed me to pass. I was ushered into a small, untidy office that was buzzing with flies and reeked of sweaty feet. It is customary in Iraq to remove one’s shoes before entering a house, and many men had been coming and going in their socks.

A Badr official apologized for not having met me at my hotel when I arrived in town. He’d been dealing with a bomb in a vehicle outside the Ministry of Education, he said. And then he had to sort out a problem at the Coalition-run television station in Basra, where the head of programming had fired one of the Iraqi announcers for questioning his policies. He clearly sided with the announcer. “They are putting on programs showing sexy women and other kinds of things that are not right for family audiences,” he said. “Many people are coming here to ask us what has happened to the TV. The citizens, you know, come to us with every problem they have. We mediate between them and the Coalition for security and everything else.”

Coping with ambiguous lines of authority was a vexing problem for SCIRI. Sayyid Hussain al-Hussaini, a bearded cleric in a black turban and a black robe, complained that “when the British want or decide to do something, they just do it, without consulting us.” Then, there was the issue of money. “The Americans and the British are not providing money for social programs—only, in the case of the Americans, for police training, so that everything is being done by the people themselves,” Hussaini claimed. “We are working, but it’s really just playing around as long as the Americans and British are in charge. It’s like Iraq is a TV, and the Americans and the British have the remote control.”

The Coalition wasn’t the only faction with an agenda. There was Dawa, a Shia party that was founded in the late fifties; the followers of Moqtada al-Sadr, the young Shia cleric who holds more extreme views than Hakim does; and the formerly outlawed Communist Party of Iraq, not to mention the God’s Revenge Party, an Islamist group that had recently set up offices in Basra. (The Party was suspected of carrying out revenge killings of Baathists, and its offices were raided shortly after I left.) “They all have their own opinions, which are different from our party’s, and they can’t agree,” Hussaini said.

SCIRI provides a variety of social services for the Shiites of southern Iraq. Abu Ahmed Rashid, a shy, bearded man in his mid-thirties who sat in a carpeted room fondling a string of jade-colored prayer beads, was rather vague about his role until I reminded him that Abdulaziz al-Hakim had authorized our meeting, and then he explained that he oversaw Badr's activities in the area. These activities, he said, involved "every aspect of life, including providing security, although we have been disarmed, as auxiliary policemen." (In May, Paul Bremer, the American administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority, told the militias to disarm, but there appears to have been a tacit agreement to overlook the fact that they did not.)

Rashid enumerated the aboveboard activities of his Badr men, which include police work in the surrounding oil fields, providing security to local factories in danger of being looted, and patrolling the Shatt al Arab waterway, the channel made by the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates that forms the border between Iraq and Iran as it runs past Basra to the Arabian Gulf. "We recently caught forty-two tons of stolen sugar and four ships with stolen oil, and we've also found and returned many stolen cars to the government offices," Rashid boasted. "So I guess Badr is becoming famous." Badr engineers were helping to restore water and electrical supplies to civilian neighborhoods, he said.

I asked Rashid about Hakim's proposal to the Coalition that the Badr fighters and their Kurdish *peshmerga* allies take over the counterinsurgency campaign from the Americans. "I believe we could do that," he said. "We could secure all of Iraq, and you would not hear one shot being fired. Some of the other political parties would coöperate with us, and together we could get rid of all the Baathists within one day. We could easily do that. We could act even now against them, but the Coalition doesn't allow us to do so."

When I mentioned that Baathists were being assassinated all the time in Basra, Rashid smiled. "God punishes bad persons so that people can live in peace," he said.

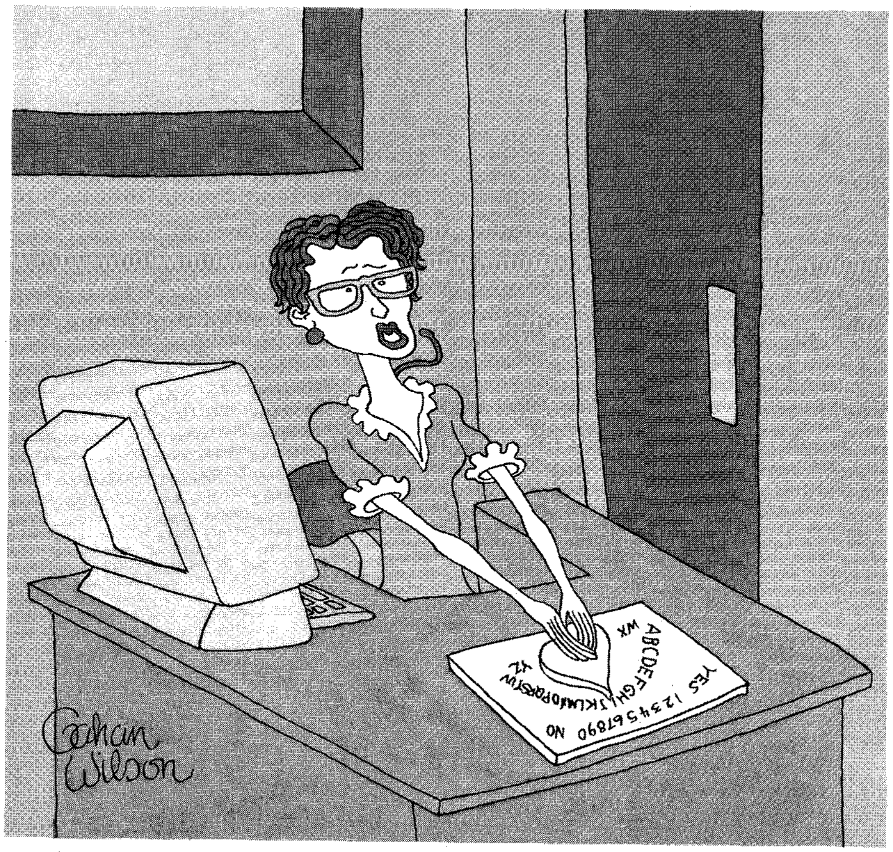
Abu Ahmed Rashid arranged for me to visit the Badr outpost in Faw, a fishing town fifty miles southeast of Basra, near the mouth of the Shatt al Arab. I was taken there by a tall, amiable man who called himself Sheikh Sameer. The Sheikh was secretive, like all the Badr men I met, and all I could get out of him about his life—in a version translated by Salaam—was that he had been a mathematics teacher until he was forced to flee to Iran following the abortive 1991 uprising of Shiites in the south.

The Faw Peninsula was one of the bloodiest battlegrounds of the Iran-Iraq War, in which hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Iranians died. About a third of the peninsula was occupied by Iranian soldiers, until Saddam, employing satellite intelligence supplied by the United States, and then poison gas, was able to dislodge them. We drove through a ruined landscape, scarred and contoured in unnatural shapes: great welts and gouges of earth where there had been tank traps and artillery emplacements, defensive trenches stretching for miles. There were no people or animals, and no trees.

After a while, we came upon several British paratroopers who were supervising a half-dozen Iraqi trainee policemen dressed in khaki uniforms. As we drew near, the Sheikh said, "Those are my men," and he nodded toward the Iraqis, who were inspecting cars they had stopped. We stood in the road while a couple of the Iraqis searched our vehicle—a new pickup truck with two rows of seats in the cab—taking care to be very deferential to the Sheikh, who began snapping pictures of them.

About five miles farther down the road, there was a large war memorial. As we drove past, several men appeared and began shouting and waving at us. The Sheikh halted the car and put it into reverse. "Badr," he said to me, in English. "Our men." They ran up to us and kissed the Sheikh, then climbed into a pickup they had parked behind the monument and followed us the rest of the way to Faw. I noticed that several of them had pistols and other weapons concealed in their clothing.

Faw is a mainly concrete-and-mud shantytown of about thirty thousand people, hemmed in by the desert on one side and the Shatt al Arab on the other. At the Badr office, a mustard-yellow stucco building on the edge of town, I was greeted warmly by the local Badr chief, Abu Hassan Sharif, who invited me into his office, a dingy room furnished with a desk and armchairs with bro-



"I'll check and see if he's available."

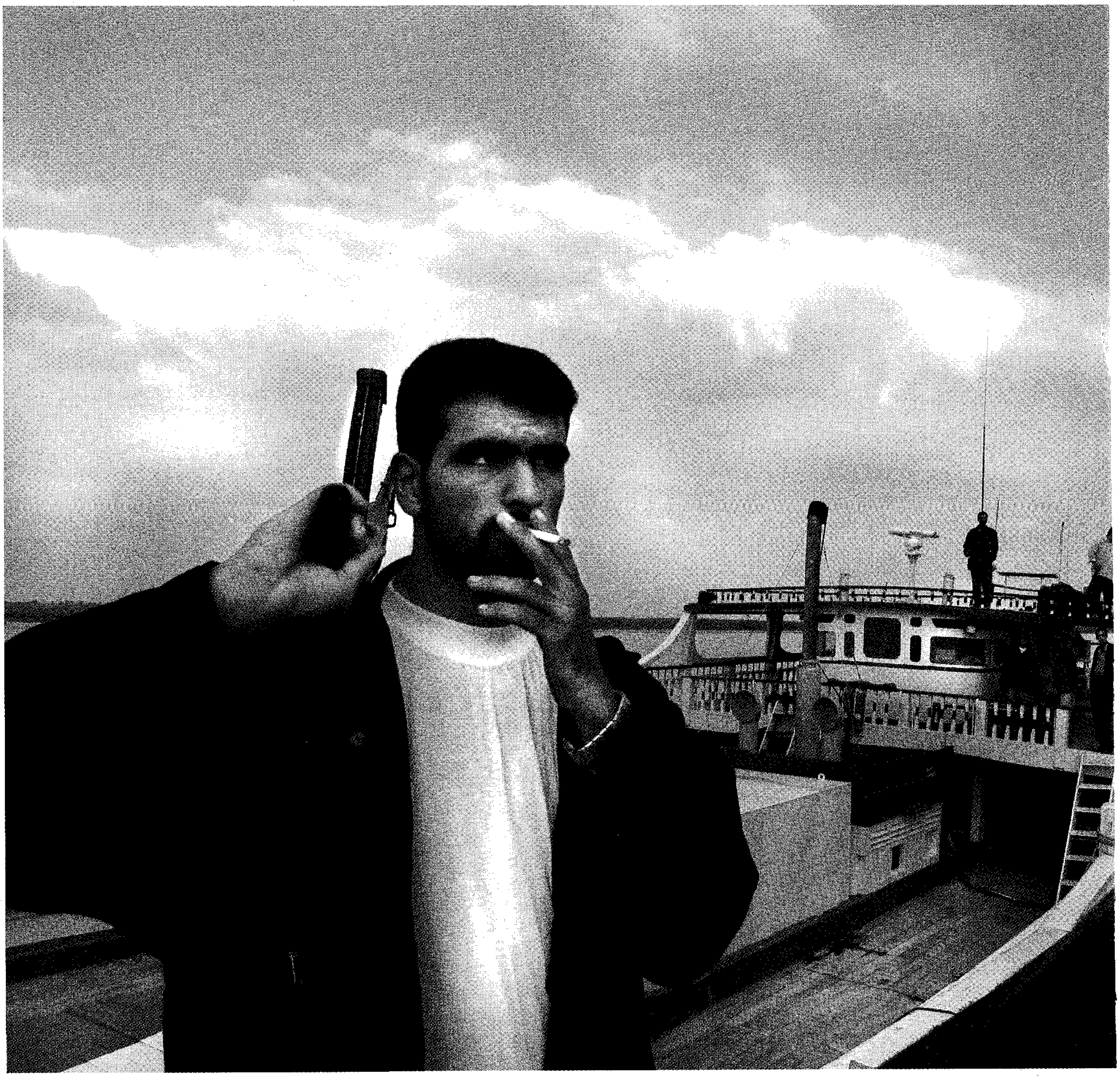
ken springs. The windows were bricked up, and the only bit of decoration was a prayer rug on the wall with a woven portrait of the martyred Ayatollah Hakim.

Sharif was born and raised in Faw, he said, and had gone into hiding in the eighties, during the Iran-Iraq War, but had participated in the uprising of 1991, following what he called the "Kuwait war." Then, like so many Iraqi Shiites, he fled to Iran. He had joined the Badr Brigade there and had lived in the Iranian holy city of Qom, where the Hakims were also based, but he had been in and out of Iraq on several occasions, doing underground work for the organization.

Sheikh Sameer, who had been sitting quietly nearby, interrupted. "Show him your wounds," he said, and Sharif, looking a little embarrassed, thrust out his left hand, which had some nerve damage, and showed me where to feel under the skin on his leg, which had a piece of shrapnel in it.

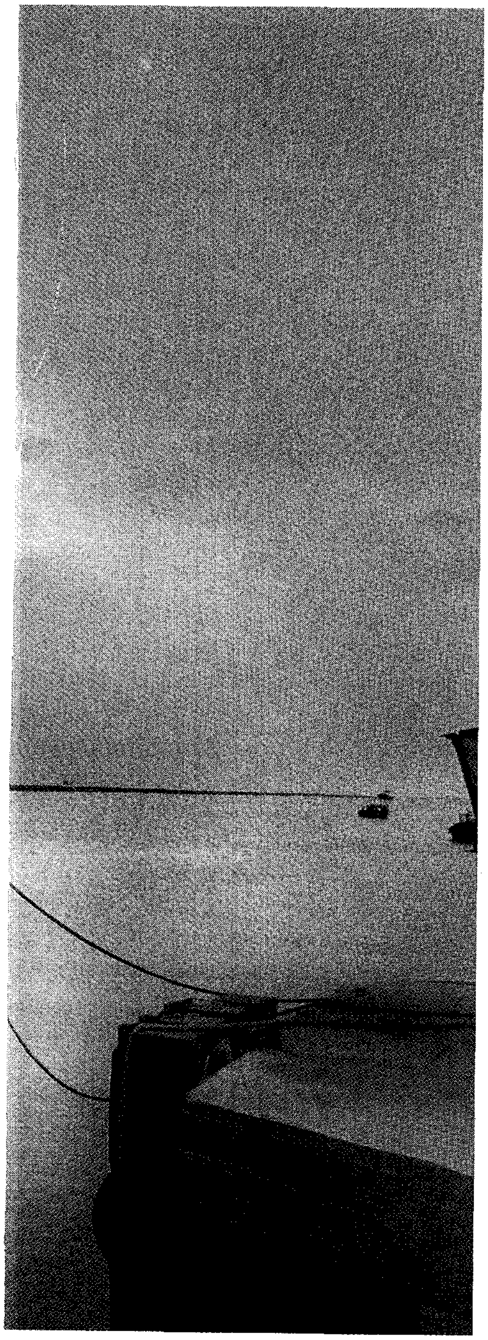
"Now I am in charge of Badr for the Faw Peninsula," Sharif said. "My job is to help the people who live here, who are mostly fishermen and farmers." He mentioned the recent capture of several boats smuggling oil, of a ship with six hundred stolen sheep on board, and of people trying to pilfer electric power cables. I asked him about the relationship between his men and the British soldiers, and he scowled. There was a small British military outpost in Faw, not far away, he said. "But there are only twenty-five British here, and we have no relations with them, only problems. They don't trust the Islamic parties, and they've given only a few of us permission to carry guns." That was why, he explained, his men had waited for us behind the monument on the desert road, and why they had kept their weapons concealed.

"We're the only ones doing police work," Sharif said. "If there is a car theft



Shiite militiamen from Hakim's Badr organization guard a smuggler's boat they intercepted on the Shatt al Arab, at the tip of the Fa or a kidnapping, the British don't do anything—the Badr does." There was also a Faw police station, with ordinary Iraqi policemen, he said, but the Badr people had to help them out. "They always work with us," he said. "We have all the intelligence files on everybody here." Relations with the police were good, not least because some of the policemen were also Badr members.

While his men prepared lunch, Sharif took me down to the port, a small, muddy tidal harbor filled with tiny scows. The air smelled, not unpleasantly, of marine muck and dried fish. The Iraqi side of the Shatt al Arab was spiked with loading winches, which resemble Erector sets. Fishing boats were tethered to the bank of the channel or rested in primitive drydocks. They were built like the old Arab dhows, with swooping waists and lunging bowsprits and pointed sterns and bows. All the boats were festooned with green-and-black Shia flags.



ninsula, on Iraq's border with Iran.

AURORA

Iran was across the river, perhaps three hundred yards away, and I could see a border checkpoint, with buildings for customs police and a paved slipway and klieg lights on tall towers. Serene-looking marshlands, much like those, I assumed, that had once spread around Basra, before Saddam drained them, stretched as far as the horizon. A great white hovercraft appeared, coming upriver at a fast clip. Sharif said that it was an Iranian passenger ferry, and that it sailed daily between Kuwait and the port of Abadan, forty miles farther up the Shatt al Arab, taking only three hours for the journey. A speedboat came out from the Iranian side to hail the ferry as it passed, and was joined moments later by a small dory from the Iraqi side. The two boats circled one another, briefly, their drivers chatting, and then they returned to their respective countries. "That is ours—Badr," Sharif said of the Iraqi boat.

A large wooden cargo boat, painted green, lay moored at a dock where six or seven young Badr men, bearded and wearing dishdashas and loose-fitting pantaloons, stood guard with Kalashnikovs and pistols. Sharif said that the owner of the boat, which had been built in India, was believed to be a man from the United Arab Emirates who had a fleet of such vessels. This was one of the oil-smuggling boats captured by Sharif's men. The crew was now in jail in Basra. Sharif walked around the vessel, opening the hatches that concealed the oil containers, and showing off for Sheikh Sameer, who took out his camera and posed for pictures with the Badr boys. They brandished their weapons and smoked and giggled.

It was now late afternoon, and as the pale-blue light began to fade, the waters of the Shatt al Arab became pinky-gray and then had no color at all. We returned to the Badr base, at Sharif's insistence, for our late lunch, and didn't get out of Faw until well after dark. I slept for most of the journey back to Basra, awakening abruptly once when Sheikh Sameer swerved the car sharply to avoid a vehicle parked across the road. He said that he thought it had been placed there intentionally, by bandits who wanted to rob us and steal his new pickup. "You notice I didn't even slow down," he boasted. He was proud of himself, and I praised him for his nerve.

The Badr organization would probably not have found such a big niche in Iraqi society if the United States had not decided to disband the Iraqi Army late last spring. Peremptorily throwing several hundred thousand soldiers out of work made for several hundred thousand angry Iraqi men on the streets, and left the task of maintaining order up to the Coalition forces, which have not been notably successful at it. The ayatollahs of the *hawza* in Najaf warned early on of the dangers of encouraging militias to take on responsibilities that were previously the domain of the Army, but the caveat appears to have been directed at Moqtada al-Sadr's extremist forces rather than at Hakim's Badr organization. (Sadr's followers are widely believed to have murdered Abdul-Majeed al-Khoie, a cleric who supported the Coalition invasion, in Najaf in April.)

The *hawza* is headed by four grand ayatollahs whose opinions are of enormous importance—particularly those of the paramount cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. "We are Shia, you know, and the Shia follow their leaders," one of Hakim's men had said to me when I was in Basra. "Even if Sayyid Abdulaziz wants to take a decision, he will first seek the opinion of Grand Ayatollah Sistani." Sistani issues his opinions in letters. He never speaks in public or talks to foreign officials or journalists, but he has delegated a few clerics to represent him, and when I was in Basra I visited one of them, Sayyid Ali Abdul al-Hakim (not closely related, as far as I know, to Abdulaziz al-Hakim), who lives in a large walled house at the edge of town, near the main British military garrison. When we drove up, a dozen or more gunmen emerged from the shadows and surrounded our car and frisked us.

We were shown into a room with armchairs arrayed around the walls and a portrait of Imam Hussein—the greatest Shia martyr, who was slaughtered by Sunnis at Karbala in 680 A.D.—

propped up in one corner. Soon Sayyid Ali Abdul, a white-bearded man with a very big nose and protruding ears, came in. He darted around rather impishly, shaking everyone's hand in a jovial way before settling on a couch.

"The Iraqi situation is very complex," Sayyid Ali Abdul said. "When the Coalition forces entered Iraq, they did not have a complete knowledge of the realities here." Specifically, they didn't understand the significance of Grand Ayatollah Sistani's pronouncements, he said. "The Coalition forces are beginning to see that the Iraqi people cannot be separated from the opinions of their religious leaders," he went on. "The people—it is in their nature—do not like what is imposed on them from the outside."

I asked Sayyid Ali Abdul whether it was possible that Ayatollah Sistani might make a specific pronouncement about security. "Sayyid Sistani has already blamed the Coalition for the insecurity in the country, and said that local forces should be allowed to restore order," he said. "But so far this has not happened. What I have said to the British authorities is that we are not Africans. We have scientists and teachers and we can do things for ourselves. We are not people with no history. We taught the West about civilization when it was in the Dark Ages. I told them one time, 'Let me restore security in Basra, with the Badr and with the tribes.'"

Sayyid Ali Abdul had a practical example of the efficacy of this idea: "After Basra fell, thieves were going daily to the steel plant to loot, and the manager asked the Badr to help him. Badr asked the British for sixty licenses for weapons for the men who they wanted to put at the plant as guards, but they were only allowed twenty. Even with these few weapons, they managed to save the factory."

"Ayatollah Sistani wants security to be restored by Iraqis," Sayyid Ali Abdul said. "But the state is not in our hands right now." He shrugged and smiled. Despite what he had said, he looked sanguine, as though the issues we had been discussing were just details that would be resolved in the fullness of time.

In Baghdad, not long before Saddam Hussein was captured, I met a Sunni businessman whom I'll call Naji. I had been given his name by his cousin, an opponent of Saddam's who left Iraq many years ago and settled in Jordan. Naji is a beefy fellow in his late thirties who speaks English well. His cousin had told him to treat me as a friend, to help me in whatever way he could, and to talk to me with complete candor. Naji picked me up at the house where I was staying and introduced me to a friend of his, a man in his late forties, whom Naji said was a doctor, although in Iraq this doesn't necessarily mean someone with a medical degree. Naji's friend had a doctorate in engineering. He had worked for the state, but was now unemployed.

Naji said that he was having problems dealing with the Coalition Provisional Authority. He claimed that he had recently won a bid to restore and refit a looted public facility in Baghdad, and that his firm had completed the job satisfactorily, and in record time, but he still had not received his money. This sort of thing, he said, was a common complaint among businessmen who dealt with the Coalition. Naji was, in general, very unhappy with the American occupation. He said that the anti-American insurgency was largely the consequence of the humiliation Iraqis felt. About forty per cent of the resistance, he said, consisted of Saddam loyalists, and the rest of other Sunni groups. "They will accept any Sunni government," Naji said. "But no other solution."

Naji favored the restoration of the Hashemite monarchy, which ruled Iraq between 1921, when it was installed by the British, and 1958, when there was a military coup. "A king for Iraq could be like a judge over the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the government," he said. "So if the head of government is a Shiite, for example, and something bad is done to the Sunni, the king would be there to stop them."

The doctor said very little, but occasionally Naji addressed questions to him in Arabic, particularly when he was speaking to me about the Iraqi insurgency. As they drove me home, Naji asked if there was anyone they might help me meet: Baathists, or ex-military officers, perhaps. I told him that I would be interested in meeting some of the people involved in the insurgency—not foot soldiers, but planners and organizers. Naji and the doctor spoke in Arabic for a few minutes, and Naji said, "O.K., then. We will arrange it. We'll pick you up tomorrow."

The next day, we drove to the western fringes of the city, past an American military camp and into a neighborhood with many large houses in the kitschy New Babylonian style favored by Saddam's nomenklatura. I recognized the road as one I had taken out of Baghdad to Fallujah in the past. Naji said that the neighborhood was Ghazaliyah, a district

"I was addicted to porn before there was an Internet."

TARZAN OF THE CANAPÉS

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where many of Saddam's former military officers lived. "Everyone here is with the resistance," he said in a complicit way as we stopped in front of one of the houses.

The doctor took us into a living room decorated with a TV set, overstuffed armchairs placed around the edges of the room, a framed Koranic inscription on the wall, and several spindly tea tables adorned with lace doilies, ashtrays, and boxes of Kleenex. I sat down facing the front door.

The doctor went back outside and returned with three men. We shook hands, and two of the men smiled, but the third man, who was stocky and rather thuggish-looking, with dark skin, seemed uncomfortable. He turned away and took a seat by the door and stared at me with frank distrust. He wore a sweater and slacks, and appeared to be in his late thirties. One of the other men, who had silver hair and a mustache, sat on the opposite side of the door. He wore a felt jacket over a gray dishdasha. The third man was very tall, and younger, perhaps in his early thirties, with fair hair. He wore an expensive blue shirt with pearl buttons, a light-green blazer, and dark-blue slacks. He was fingering a string of blue prayer beads.

I introduced myself, to put them at ease, and told them that I had been in Iraq before and during the recent war. Then, while quite a bit of Arabic was spoken, not all of which Naji translated, I attempted to establish ground rules. I explained to the men that I needed to be able to call them something, so that I could identify their statements in my notes, and they all gave me names, obviously false ones. The silver-haired man told me to call him Abu Ahmed. The thuggish man gave his name as Abu Barwan, and the tall, fair-haired man chose Abu Abdullah. They smiled and joked among themselves about the names they had selected. I showed them my satellite phone, which was turned off, and I picked up a small tape recorder that I had brought along, and asked them if I could tape our conversation. The thuggish man shook his head, and the fair-haired man said, in rough English, that they didn't want to be recorded. Fine, I said, I would just take notes.

I began by asking how they felt about President Bush's characterization of the Iraqi resistance as a gang of criminals. Abu Ahmed, the silver-haired man, wanted to answer this. "Why do you suppose the resistance started in this area, and in places like Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul?" he said. "This is a Sunni society. Before the war, the people who live here controlled the government and the Army. Do you think the resistance is coming from these people or from the simple folk? Naturally, the resistance comes from this area, and it is made up of officers, doctors, lawyers, and journalists."

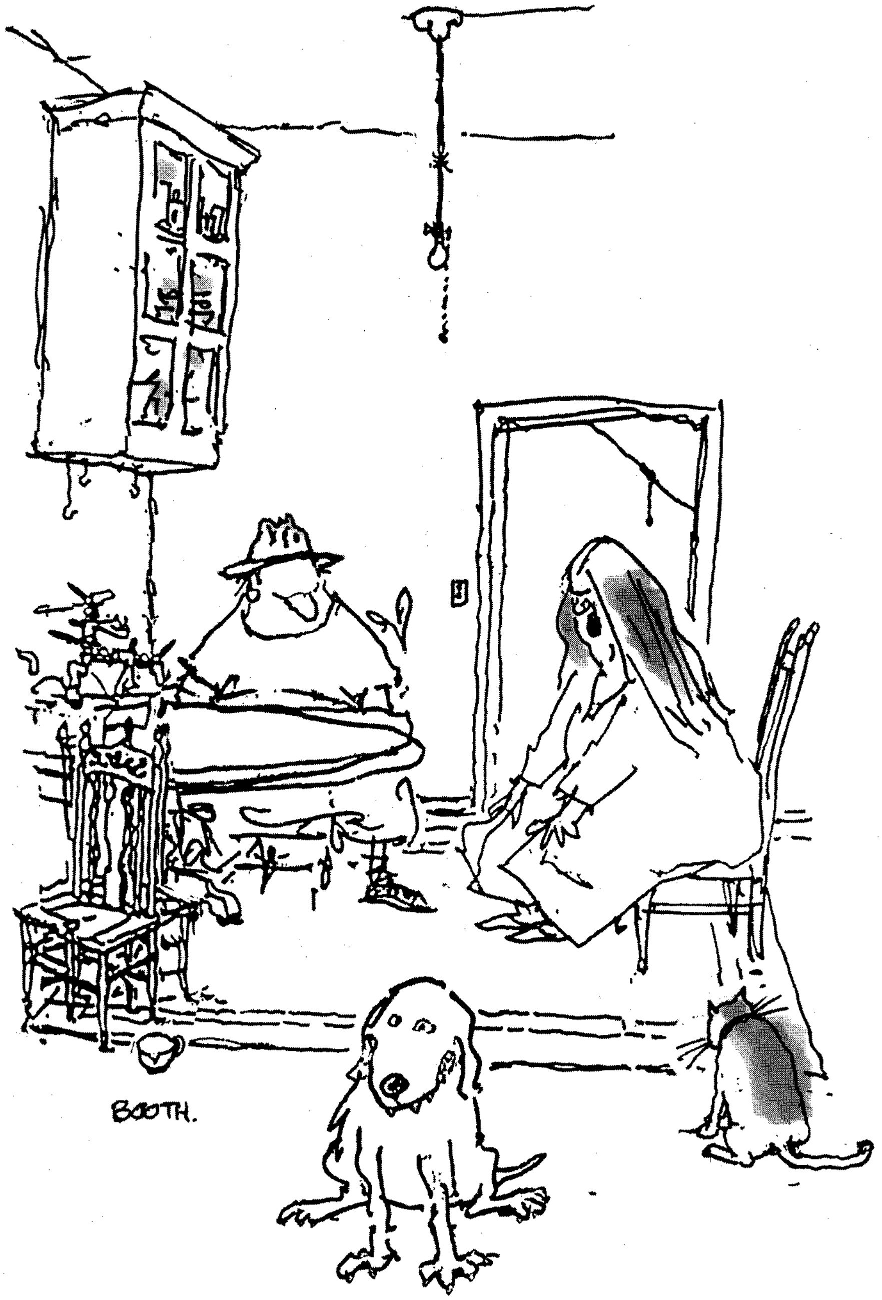
Speaking in English, but occasionally reverting to Arabic, which Naji translated as best he could, the fair-haired man, Abu Abdullah, pitched in. "The world is a small village," he said. "We have the Internet, communications systems, and we have knowledgeable people, scientists. The Americans think they are dealing with a foolish society. They are proud of their soldiers and their weapons, and they are surprised at the response of the people who oppose them. But I am not surprised when I see that the Americans are now losing the war. And I will tell you that they will face more losses very soon. The negotiations with the Governing Council will fail. Do you know why? Because the Governing Council does not represent Iraqi society. It has about twenty parties, and each party has a different goal. Do you think they will work together? I don't think so."

Abu Abdullah sat forward and spoke directly to me, in English. "I don't trust you, my friend. Imagine if someone from Europe or Mexico came to your country with guns—could you trust them?" I shook my head in what I hoped seemed an agreeable way, but I didn't like the way the conversation was going. Abu Abdullah paused. "But that doesn't mean I will do anything against you," he said. "You can be from Scotland Yard or the C.I.A. I don't mind, because we want your countries to have this information."

Abu Abdullah continued, "The killing of Americans in Iraq is normal, my friend. If they weren't being killed, it would not be normal."

I asked him who the suicide bombers were.

"They are Iraqis," he replied, smiling broadly. "Remember Ansar al-Islam?"—the Iraqi Kurds who had Islamist camps in northern Iraq until they were bombed by the Americans during the war. "They are Iraqis. And Saddam also trained six thousand *jihadis*, you know, from Iraq and all over—people who believe that this is a religious war." He leaned for-



"I'd leave Redford for George Clooney in a heartbeat."

ward again. "Do you really believe the resistance is only five thousand men?" This was a Pentagon estimate. Abu Abdullah shook his head contemptuously. "Rumsfeld!" he spat. "The only job I'd give him is as my driver."

Naji said that it was time for prayers. The doctor went out of the room and returned with some prayer rugs. He put them diagonally on the floor, in the center of the room, and for ten minutes or so Naji and he and the three insurgents knelt and bent forward, murmuring.

When they had returned to their seats, and the doctor had brought refreshments—Turkish coffee, small Iraqi pastries, and Pepsis—I asked Abu Abdullah if he was fighting for Saddam.

"No," he replied. "I liked him, but he was a thief. I liked him because he was against the Americans."

"Then what group are you in?" I asked.

"What group?" he stared at me stonily. "What gave you the idea we have a group? Don't make a mistake, my friend. We have no connection to these people killing Americans. We just know people." He smiled sarcastically.

It didn't seem to me that the men had much specific information about most of the attacks. Abu Abdullah, for instance, suggested that Iran and Syria had been involved in the terrorist attacks against the U.N. and the International Committee of the Red Cross, since both countries wished to keep the Americans bogged down in Iraq. Iran had ordered Hakim's assassination, he said, because the Ayatollah had betrayed it by coöperating with the Coalition. But when I asked about the nineteen Italians who were killed in a bomb attack in Nasiriyah, all the men in the room, including Naji and the doctor, laughed uproariously. Naji said, chuckling, "This, of course, was by the Sunni resistance."

I ran out of paper at this point, and the doctor got up and left the room and returned with a brand-new notebook. It was embossed with a logo showing clasped hands and a shield emblazoned with stars and stripes. The words "United States Agency for International Development" were printed around the edges of the shield. The doctor laughed and winked. "Keep it—it's yours," he said.

I asked the men about the American plans for a transfer of authority. How did they feel about the possibility of a government headed by Abdulaziz al-Hakim?

"If there is an election," Abu Ahmed said, "and the people choose anyone from the Shia, including Hakim, as President, I will agree with that, and the resistance will stop."

Abu Barwan, who had said almost nothing all afternoon, shook his head. "No," he said. "I believe that the resistance would continue against the new Shia government and the Americans."

Abu Abdullah agreed. "If the Americans give power to the Shiites because they think there are more of them than there are Sunnis, the resistance will not stop. The Iraqi Sunnis will reject this, because the Americans brought Abdulaziz and gave him everything—men, guns, and employment—everything he wanted. The Iraqi people don't want double agents, people working for any other country."

Toward the end of the conversation, I asked each of the men to tell me something about himself. Abu Ahmed said that he had been an officer in the Army: "I had a good salary, a car and driver."

Abu Barwan, the taciturn man, said that he didn't want to say what he used to do. He spoke to Naji in Arabic for a moment. Naji said to me, "He wants me to say that he was unemployed before and is unemployed now."

Abu Abdullah, speaking in English directly to me, said simply, with a smile, "I am a businessman."

I asked the men if they had any ideas of their own about a solution to Iraq's problems.

"One of the main parties should be the Baath Party," Abu Ahmed said. "I think it has good goals, but the people who were in authority gave it a bad image. But they still have the biggest base in Iraq. And I think Iraq should be a kingdom, with a king brought from any famous Hashemite Sunni family—but Iraqi."

Abu Barwan, looking at the floor, arms crossed, grunted. "Same thing."

"The solution, I think, is that the Americans should go," Abu Abdullah said. "I don't think America knows what it's doing here."

We shook hands again, and the three men left the room with the doctor, who soon returned. Naji said that we would wait, so that the men could depart without being seen. After about five minutes, we got up and left the house. It was now dark, and the street was deserted. As Naji and the doctor drove me back home, they told me a bit more about the men. Abu Ahmed, the former officer, was supplying the insurgents with weapons. Abu Barwan, the unfriendly one, was an active member of the insurgency, a fighter, and had formerly been one of Qusay Hussein's Special Republican Guards. Abu Abdullah, with whom they were less familiar, was an Iraqi who had been abroad, supposedly in Canada, for the past twelve years, and had returned to Iraq after the war. He was a Muslim fundamentalist, Naji explained, close in his thinking to the Wahhabis. That was all they knew about him.

The three insurgents were apparently part of a network of anti-American Sunnis, many of whom, it turned out, were being monitored by the United States as the search for Saddam narrowed. I don't know what happened to them after he was caught, but I wonder if they are in that jail out by the Baghdad airport, along with Tariq Aziz.

On January 18th, the day before Paul Bremer and a delegation of Iraqis, including Abdulaziz al-Hakim, met with Kofi Annan at the United Nations to sort out the election process, a huge truck bomb exploded outside the Assassin's Gate, the main gate of Saddam's former Republican Palace, which is now the Coalition's headquarters. At least twenty-five people were killed, almost all of them Iraqis employed by the Coalition—people who, in the eyes of insurgents like the three men I had talked to, are traitors. Iraqis who coöperate with Coalition troops are targets because the Coalition is the enemy. Most Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis are united in their dislike of foreign troops on their soil, and it is this sentiment, which transcends ethnic and religious loyalties, that could make it possible for an essentially Shia government to keep the peace in Iraq.

Such a government would, of course, not be nearly as secular as the United States wishes. It might end up being closer to a theocratic state than even most Shiites imagined possible. There was a hint about this on December 29th, when the Governing Council, during Hakim's tenure as its head, abrogated Iraq's civil code regulating domestic matters and replaced it with religious law. Under the new system, Shiite and Sunni imams would have authority over marriage, dowries, divorce, alimony settlements, and inheritance. Dozens of Iraqi women's groups gathered in Fardous Square to protest the decree, which abolished rights that Iraqi women have enjoyed for more than forty years. But Shiites are not a monolithic bloc, and it seems unlikely that any future Iraqi government would be a theocracy in the mode of Iran, where, in any case, the clerics are divided and are much weaker than they once were.

In anticipation of elections, Hakim has been acting Presidential. In December, when he was the head of the Governing Council, he met with Donald Rumsfeld in Iraq and spent ten days conferring with heads of state and foreign ministers in Spain, France, the U.K., Germany, Russia, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates.

Hakim reminded me that, at a conference held in London a few months before the war began, all the major Iraqi parties had agreed that "the Islamic identity of the Iraqi people" would be respected by a future government. Nothing had changed, he said, and he was still convinced that Iraq could be stabilized with a Shia party in office. "I'll tell you a story to explain why," Hakim went on. "Before the toppling of the regime, one of the most powerful figures with Saddam Hussein fled Iraq and joined the opposition. He came to meet with my brother Ayatollah Hakim, and he told him, 'We are afraid of you.' The Ayatollah said, 'Why?' He said, 'We're afraid because of the crimes we have committed against you.' And he mentioned a massacre in Hillah—he told us about it, and we didn't even know it had happened then. 'We captured many people and separated them into three groups,' he said"—that would have been in 1991, after the Shia revolt had been put down. " 'The first group we were sure was made up of people who were guilty. The second group we had doubts about, and the third group was innocent. We telephoned the high command to ask what we should do with them. They said we should kill them all, and that's what we did.' "

The point of his story, Hakim explained, was that the man, a general, who had confessed to carrying out the crimes, was not punished, because he had joined the opposition, and because Ayatollah Hakim genuinely believed in the need for national reconciliation. When the Ayatollah was murdered last summer, he said, mourning ceremonies were held throughout Iraq, "even in Fallujah"—in the Sunni triangle. "In all of Iraq's history, there is no record of Iraqis engaged in civil war with one another for ethnic or religious reasons," Hakim said. "It's been a history of unjust governments. The problems were never between the people." ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

MIRACLE IN A BOTTLE

Dietary supplements are unregulated, some are unsafe—and Americans can't get enough of them.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

One day last September, as Britney Spears was about to board a flight to Los Angeles from London, a rectangular blue bottle fell out of her purse. She quickly stuffed it back in, but not before the paparazzi recorded the event. Neither Spears nor her spokesman was willing to comment on the contents of the bottle, but the next morning London's *Daily Express* published a page of pictures under the headline "EXCLUSIVE: POP PRINCESS SPOTTED AT AIRPORT WITH POT OF SLIMMING TABLETS." Spears was apparently carrying Zantrex-3, one of the most popular weight-loss supplements currently sold in the United States. The pill, which retails at about fifty dollars for a month's supply, contains a huge dose of caffeine, some green tea, and three common South American herbs that also act as stimulants. It hit the U.S. market last March and has had a success that would be hard to overstate. Millions of bottles have been sold, and during the Christmas season it was displayed in the windows of the nation's largest chain of vitamin shops, G.N.C. (It is so highly sought after that many of the stores keep it in locked cabinets.) Zantrex-3 is also sold at CVS, Rite Aid, Wal-Mart, and other chains, and over the telephone and on the Internet. If you type "Zantrex" into Google, more than a hundred thousand citations will appear. At any moment, there are scores of people auctioning the stuff on eBay.

Perhaps the most interesting element of Zantrex-3's success story, however, is that it is far from unique. There are hundreds of similar products on the market today, and they are bought by millions of Americans. And though Zantrex's manufacturer makes some heady claims ("the most advanced weight control compound period"), so do the people who sell Stacker 2 and Anorex (whose publicity assures us that the "genetic link" to obesity means that repeated diet failure is "not your fault"), along with those who sell Carb Eliminator and Fat Eliminator. Almost all of these compounds suggest that they can help people lose weight and regain lost vigor, and often without diet, exercise, or any other effort.

The diet-pill business may be the most visible segment of the vitamin-, mineral-, and herbal-supplement industry, but it is by no means the largest. Thousands of different tablets, elixirs, potions, and pills are sold in the United States, and remarkably little is known about most of them. That doesn't deter consumers. Since 1994, when Congress passed a law that deregulated the supplement industry and opened it to a flood of new products, the use of largely unproved herbal remedies—from blueberry extract for impaired vision to saw palmetto for the treatment of enlarged prostates and echinacea to prevent colds—has increased as rapidly as the use of any commonly prescribed drug.

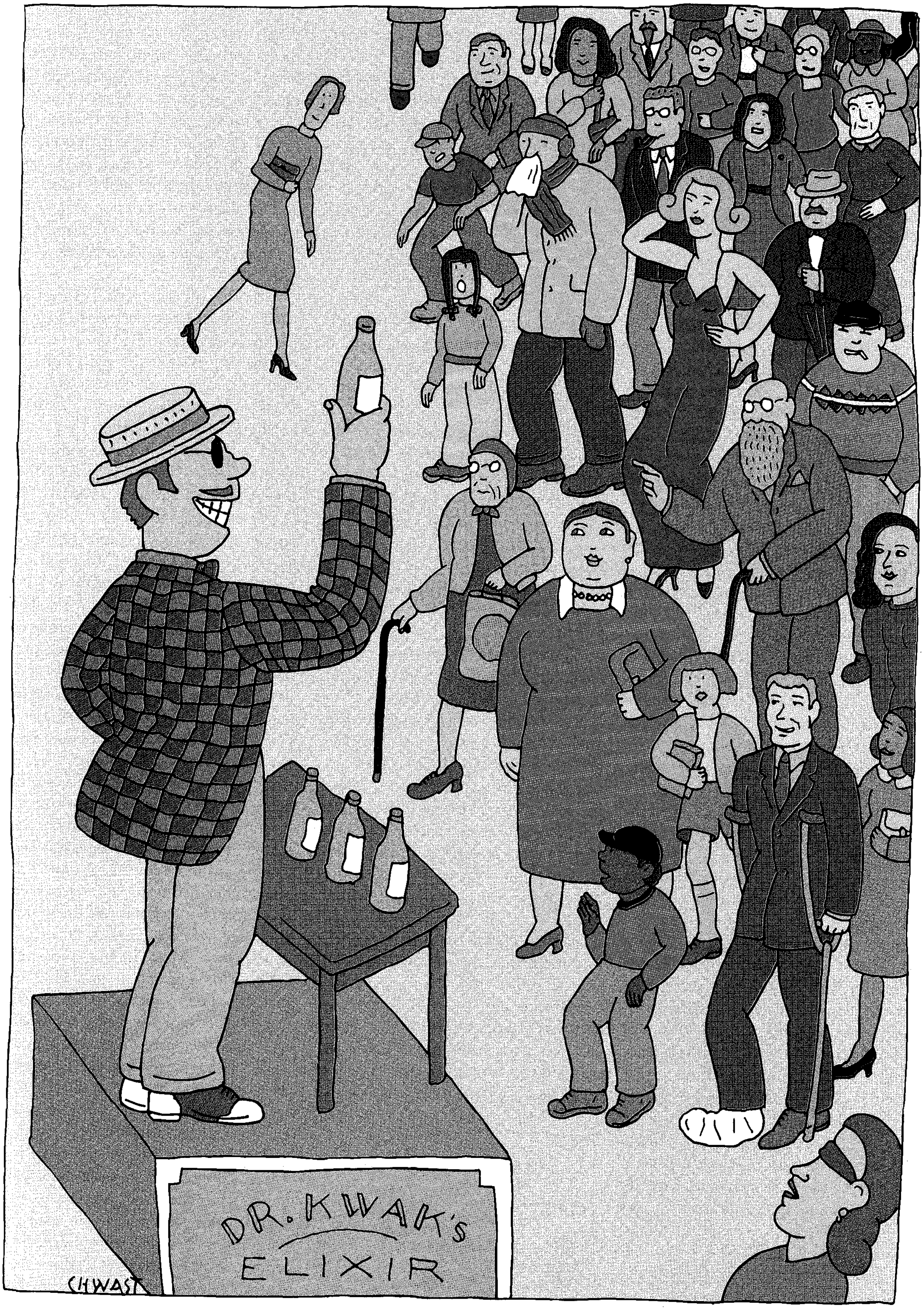
Since that legislation, the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, became law, companies have been able to say nearly anything they want about the potential health benefits of what they sell. As long as they don't blatantly lie or claim to have a cure for a specific disease, such as cancer, diabetes, or AIDS, they can assert—without providing evidence—that a product is designed to support a healthy heart (CardiAll, for example), protect cells from damage (Liverite), or improve the function of a compromised immune system (Resist). There are almost no standards that regulate how the pills are made, and they receive almost no scrutiny once they are, so consumers never truly know what they are getting. Companies are not required to prove that products are effective, or even safe, before they are put on the market.

Still, there is more to the growing reliance on supplements than the lapses of a single law: Americans long ago wearied of taking doctors' orders, and, increasingly, they are skeptical about the motives of big pharmaceutical companies. People want to feel in control of their own health. Supplements, with their "natural" connotations and cultivated image of self-reliance, let them do that. There is even a word to describe all the things—other than plain food—that people consume in the pursuit of health: nutraceutical.

Nutraceuticals are found everywhere today, in foods fortified with "extra" vitamins, in sports drinks, in "enriched" water, and now even in candy. Six out of ten adults in the United States take one or more supplements each day. Often, these include multivitamins, which are frequently recommended by physicians, but a staggering number of amino acids, weight-loss cures, and herbal tonics are also swallowed every day, all in the belief that they will improve health, fend off disease, or make up for dietary and behavioral habits that have placed obesity and indolence among the leading health problems facing the United States. Last year, Americans spent nineteen billion dollars on dietary supplements—nearly five times as much as they did just a decade ago. And they spent that money on everything from Vitamin C to garlic (the uses of which vary, with benefits that are never clear), from kava (which the F.D.A. says may cause severe liver damage but which is still widely available in health-food stores as a remedy for stress) to comfrey (an herb of dubious value commonly used to quell irritated stomachs), and even ephedra, which the federal government only recently decided to ban, despite reports over the last eight years implicating it in scores of deaths and hundreds of strokes, seizures, and other severe maladies.

"For many people, this whole thing is about much more than taking their vitamins," Loren D. Israelsen, the executive director of the Utah Natural Products Alliance, and a principal architect of the 1994 legislation, told me not long ago. "This is really a belief system, almost a

SEYMOUR CHWAST


DR. KWAK's
ELIXIR
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religion. Americans believe they have the right to address their health problems in the way that seems most useful to them. Often, that means supplements. When the public senses that the government is trying to limit its access to this kind of thing, it always reacts with remarkable anger—people are even willing to shoulder a rifle over it. They are ready to believe anything if it brings them a little hope." Frequently, such products come veiled in a cloak of science. Ads for Zantrex-3, for example, claim that its "superior power is validated by a direct comparison of published medical studies . . . scientific fact . . . irrefutable clinical data." The people who sell the pills on the telephone don't rely on science at all, however, when they tell callers that the capsules in those blue bottles could change their lives.

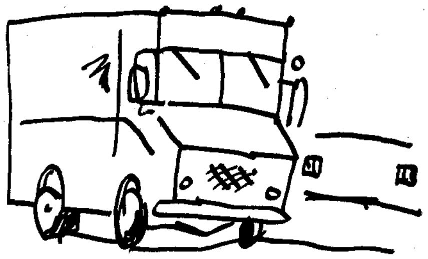
"When I train salespeople, I say to them, 'Do you know what people are calling you for? It isn't the pill. They are calling you for hope. That is really what they want from you,' " Don Atkinson, who is the vice-president of sales for Basic Research, the privately held conglomerate that distributes Zantrex-3, told me recently. I spoke with him in his office in Salt Lake City, which regards itself as the Silicon Valley of the dietary-supplement industry. Atkinson, a hearty and engaging man with a graying buzz cut and a firm handshake, slowly wrote the word "hope" on a lined piece of paper soon after I came in. "The customer has been overweight for years. And they have tried everything. And they have been on Atkins and everything else and nothing has worked. And some of these people are so incapacitated by their weight and their problems associated with it that they would like to die. Just wish they could just die. And they dial up and they are unhappy people. And they think, O.K., if I take this and it doesn't work it's further evidence that I am a failure. Our job is to give them hope. To say, 'You know what? You can do this.' " Atkinson stopped for a moment and pumped his right fist in the air. "I love my job," he said. "And do you know why? Because when I get up in the morning I know that somebody's life is better because we are here. Somebody today got some hope."

Atkinson told me that he was delighted by the Britney Spears news, not so much because of the publicity windfall but for the larger message it conveyed. "You know what is great about that? It's the fact that she is using a weight-loss product and she looks terrific. Just the fact that we are even talking about what Britney Spears uses or doesn't use to keep her weight down tells the whole wide world that it's O.K. to be a little overweight and it's O.K. to work on it. And it's O.K. to use things to help you get there. That's what it all says to me, and that is why we are here."

Herbs have been ingested regularly, in every conceivable combination, for thousands of years, and many are clearly beneficial. Vitamins and minerals are essential for human health: calcium supplements have prevented perhaps millions of cases of osteoporosis; folic acid helps prevent neural-tube defects; insufficient amounts of Vitamin B_{12} can lead to dementia. Simply eating citrus fruit, and the Vitamin C it contains, was enough to vanquish scurvy, which in the mid-eighteenth century killed more British sailors than the wars that Britain fought.

The way that nutrients work in foods has come to be properly understood only in the past hundred years. Because of the lack of specific knowledge, the preceding era had been one of open and unapologetic quackery. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, patent-medicine men roamed the United States. For every illness imaginable, they promised wondrous products and magical cures.

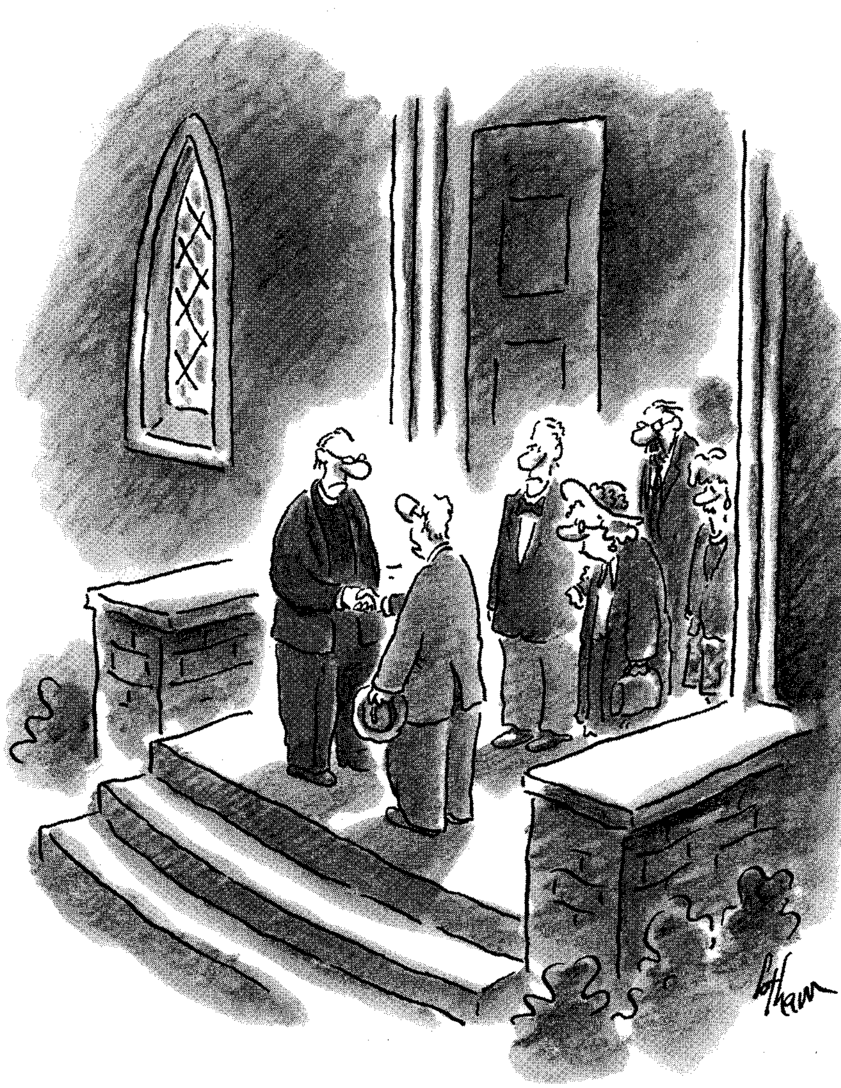
The rapid growth of patent medicines was largely a result of two unrelated events, and they eerily foreshadowed the 1994 Dietary Supplement Act and the rise of the Internet as a commercial tool. In 1793, Congress passed patent legislation that permitted manufacturers to protect their formulas (without requiring that they even work). Around the same time, the number of newspapers published in the United States began to increase dramatically. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the patent-medicine business accounted for more newspaper advertising than any other kind of product. Many manufacturers became rich; some became famous. Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, advertised as "A Positive Cure" for "all those Painful Complaints and Weaknesses so common to our best female population," made Pinkham's face as recognizable then as Martha Stewart's is today.



In 1914, officials of the American Medical Association decided to analyze Pinkham's compound. It turned out to be twenty per cent pure alcohol and eighty per cent common vegetable extracts. Most patent medicines had similar ingredients. Sometimes they were laced with cocaine, caffeine, opium, or even morphine. It's not surprising that they provided a few hours' worth of relief. There was no restriction on the vast armamentarium of remedies on the market until 1906, when the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed, mainly as a result of the revelations in Upton Sinclair's book "The Jungle." The act permitted the Bureau of Chemistry, which preceded the Food and Drug Administration, to insure that labels contained no false or misleading advertising. For a while, at least, snake-oil salesmen went the way of the Conestoga wagon.

Since then, the pendulum has swung between unregulated anarchy and restrictions that outrage many Americans. It has usually taken a disaster to persuade Congress to adopt strict regulations. Sulfanilamide, a drug prescribed to treat streptococcal infections, was used safely and effectively for years in tablet and powder form. Most children can't swallow pills, though, and in June, 1937, researchers at one company found that the drug would dissolve in diethylene glycol; they tested the mixture for flavor, appearance, and fragrance—but not for toxicity—and then shipped it all over the country. They overlooked one important characteristic of the solution: diethylene glycol, normally used as an antifreeze, is a deadly poison. Within weeks, scores of children were dead. The victims experienced severe abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, stupor, and convulsions. In a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, one woman described the death of her child: "Even the memory of her is mixed with sorrow for we can see her little body tossing to and fro and hear that little voice screaming with pain and it seems as though it would drive me insane." The next year, after a hundred and thirty-seven deaths, Congress passed the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, which finally gave the F.D.A. the authority it needed to regulate such products.

For many years afterward, there was little controversy about drugs or about dietary supplements, which mostly meant vitamins and minerals. "It didn't use to be so complicated," Annette Dickinson told me. She is the president of the Council for Responsible Nutrition, which is the most influential of the many groups that look after the interests of the supplement industry. Each year, supplement manufacturers contribute millions of dollars to political candidates. The industry has been remarkably successful in arguing that, because the First Amendment protects commercial speech, it can be used in defense of any claim that includes even a hint of truth. Dickinson is an aggressive supporter of supplements, yet she acknowledges that charlatans have proliferated wildly in the past decade, making her job, and that of most reputable manufacturers, much harder. In Dickinson's view, the industry would be better served if it returned its focus to the core nutrients—basic vitamin and mineral supplements. "In the beginning, you had your one-a-days, and there were minerals and herbal products, too. A drug was something intended to treat or cure a disease, and you needed to have proof that it could do those things; the line between foods and drugs was absolutely bright and clear. If you made a disease-related claim for something that was not approved, the F.D.A. would come down on you like a ton of bricks. All through the forties and the fifties and the sixties, that was true."



"It saddens me to think that so many of my customers are going to Hell."

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By the middle of the nineteen-seventies, as the complex relationship between diet and health became more fully understood, the distinctions between foods, drugs, and supplements began to blur. First, with a major report issued in 1977 by the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, and then with studies by the National Academy of Sciences and other research groups, the government started telling Americans to alter their diets if they wanted to have long and healthy lives. Advice about ways to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and many cancers and other chronic illnesses became routine: eat less salt and fat and add fibre and whole grains; eat more fruits and vegetables and watch the calories. Food companies were eager to promote many of their products as medically beneficial. It was illegal, however, to suggest that there was a relationship between the ingredients in a commercial food and the treatment or prevention of a disease. Then, in 1984, the Kellogg Company launched a campaign, in conjunction with the National Cancer Institute, in which All-Bran cereal was used to illustrate how a low-fat, high-fibre diet might reduce the risk for certain types of cancer. These days, it is almost impossible to pass by a supermarket shelf and not encounter such claims; but All-Bran was the first case in which a manufacturer issued a statement that was interpreted widely as "Eat this product because it will help prevent cancer." It led to the era of product labels, and completely changed the way Americans think about not only foods but dietary supplements as well.

Since then, the English language has been stretched to its limits in the attempt to link products to health benefits. Even claims that are true may be irrelevant. Vitamin A, for example, is important for good vision—as supplements for sale in any health-food store will tell you. Insufficient consumption of Vitamin A causes hundreds of thousands of cases of blindness around the world each year, but not in the United States; here people

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don’t have vision problems arising from a lack of Vitamin A. Although statements advertising Vitamin A for good vision may, like many others, be legally permissible, they are meaningless. “The laws allow manufacturers to make fine legalistic claims,” Paul M. Coates, the director of the Office of Dietary Supplements at the National Institutes of Health, told me. “What we now have is an entire cottage industry of creative linguistics dedicated solely to selling these products.” Instead of mentioning a disease (which in most cases would be illegal without F.D.A. approval), companies make claims that a food can affect the structure or function of the body. Such claims can appear on any food, no matter how unhealthy it is. You cannot assert that a product “reduces” cholesterol, but you can certainly say that it “maintains healthy cholesterol levels.” You cannot state that the herb echinacea cures anything, since it has never been shown to do that. But there is no prohibition on stating that it “has natural antibiotic actions” and is considered “an excellent herb for infections of all kinds.” Gingko biloba has been recommended to Alzheimer’s patients because it “supports memory function.” Does it? Since research is not required before a supplement is released, there are not nearly enough data to know.

In a report published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, scientists compared the effects of echinacea with a placebo in treating colds. Echinacea is one of the most commonly used cold remedies in the United States. But the study, of more than four hundred children over a four-month period, showed that a placebo worked just as well, and that children treated with echinacea were more likely to develop a rash than those who took nothing. Studies like that are rare, since they cost money that manufacturers are not required to spend. But they are at least as likely to disprove benefits as to confirm them. Ginseng has long been promoted as an energy booster, for example, yet the military, in studies of possible energy enhancements for troops, has found it worthless. Still, in my local health-food store not long ago I saw more than a dozen supplements advertising the “fact” that ginseng improves energy.

“It was all done for crass commercial reasons,” Marion Nestle told me. Nestle, the former chairman of the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health at New York University, is the author of “Food Politics,” which examines in detail the ways in which the food and supplement industries influence the nutritional policy of the United States and the health of its citizens. “In the name of health! The companies have masked it in an argument for freedom of speech. And look at some of the ways it all plays out. Obesity is an epidemic in our country. Is this helping? Not a bit.” She went on, “I was staying in California this summer at the house of some friends. They had all sorts of health-food products for kids, and, to my surprise, among them were shark-shaped fruit snacks with Vitamin C and gummy bears with echinacea. It’s *candy* masquerading as something that will improve a child’s health. It comes in one-ounce packages. Just the right size to throw in a lunch pail. It’s brilliant marketing. Just brilliant.”

One recent Harris poll found that most people believe that if a supplement is on the market it must have been approved by some government agency (not true); that manufacturers are prohibited from making claims for their products unless they have provided data to back those claims up (no such laws exist); and that companies are required to include warnings about potential risks and side effects (they aren’t). “When something goes wrong, though, most people expect government health officials to find a solution,” David A. Kessler told me. Kessler, who is the dean of the School of Medicine at the University of California at San Francisco, was the F.D.A. commissioner when Congress passed the Dietary Supplement Act, which he adamantly opposed. “This is really the classic American ambivalence, and it has always been part of our nature,” he said. “The view of most people is simple: I want access to everything and I want it now.” The Federal Trade Commission—not the F.D.A.—regulates supplement advertising. But the F.T.C. is principally concerned with commerce, not science: it focusses on the content of the labels, not the content of the pills. Although since 1994 the agency has sued more than a hundred diet-pill companies, in 2002 it found that at least half of all weight-loss ads contained false or misleading statements. Despite its vigilance, the agency has an impossible job; for each success, ten new companies seem to appear.

When people get sick, Dr. Kessler pointed out, the refrain is always “ ‘Where the hell is the F.D.A. to protect me?’ The supplement industry doesn’t have to report adverse events, so the F.D.A. doesn’t have the data it needs to protect people. You cannot prove something is unsafe if you don’t have the data. It’s the ultimate Catch-22. It is also a colossal failure to protect the public health of this country."

Until a year ago, when Steve Belcher, a twenty-three-year-old pitcher for the Baltimore Orioles, died of heatstroke after taking an over-the-counter product that contained ephedra, it was by far the most popular supplement in the United States, bringing in a billion dollars a year and accounting for more than ten per cent of the supplement industry's annual sales. Ephedrine, the herb's active ingredient, boosts adrenaline, stresses the heart, raises blood pressure, and increases the rate of a person's metabolism. Derived from the Asian herb ma huang, it seems to help with short-term weight loss and with increasing physical stamina. When used in combination with caffeine, as it often is, ephedra is associated with an increased risk of heart attack, stroke tachycardias, palpitations, anxiety, psychosis, and death. Even though it was cited as a contributing factor in Belcher's death, only three states—New York, California, and Illinois—subsequently banned supplements containing ephedra. After numerous studies and nearly a year of review, the F.D.A. announced, on December 30th, that it would prohibit the sale of such supplements. Yet, because ephedra is not a drug, it will be several months before the ruling works its way through the federal bureaucracy. (The agency has recognized for years that ephedra can be dangerous; its use in over-the-counter medicine has been regulated since 1983.)

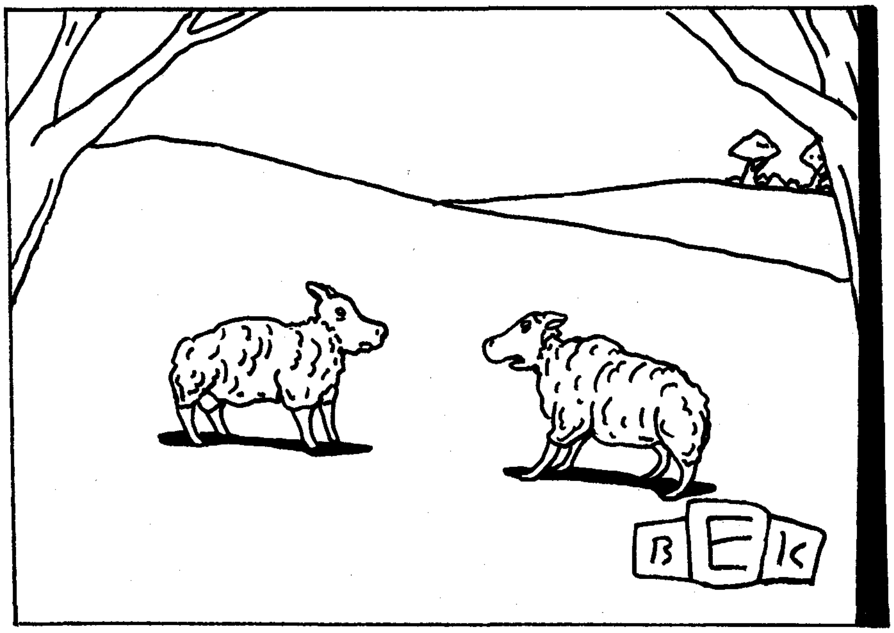
Despite the risks, the appeal of diet pills is not hard to understand. Each year, obesity kills millions of Americans and costs billions of dollars. Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey show that almost sixty-five per cent of the adult population is overweight. The prevalence of obesity among children is spreading, and if current trends continue more than forty per cent of Americans will be clinically obese within five years. The burden on the health system, not to mention the weakened quality of life that obesity causes, will be enormous.

I stumbled across an advertisement for Zantrex-3 while riding on the subway in New York one day. The name seemed coolly futuristic, and the ad was inviting, featuring an impossibly lithe and attractive couple dancing the tango. The copy beneath them promised—in "one amazing superpill"—both weight loss and incredible energy. "You are not obese," Zantrex-3 ads say. "You just need to lose a quick ten to fifteen pounds . . . and you want energy . . . plenty of energy."

Who could argue with that? I looked for the name of the company at the bottom of the ad: Zoller Laboratories. When I called the 800 number printed on the advertisement, the woman who answered told me that the company was based in Salt Lake City, but I couldn't find it listed in any of the databases that I normally use for research. Then I noticed, in an article about Britney Spears's "weight problems," that the chief scientist at Zoller was quoted by name. I dialled the 800 number again and asked to speak with him. He answered the phone, but was startled when I asked if I could fly out and talk with him. He promised to call me back. He never did, but eventually the public-relations representative for a company called Basic Research invited me to visit Basic's headquarters, in Salt Lake City. He told me that Basic was the exclusive distributor of Zantrex-3. Zoller Laboratories does exist, but there are no offices and no labs. It's a company created by the marketing team at Basic because its name sounds scientific.

Basic Research is a privately held conglomerate based in a modern, hundred-and-fifty-thousand-square-foot factory that was previously the U.S. assembly headquarters for Palm Pilot. Having tripled in size in the last year alone, the company is looking for more space nearby. The headquarters is a five-minute drive from the Salt Lake airport, and there are more than a dozen similarly squat industrial buildings scattered along the highway among the Days Inns and Guest Quarters. Most are home to companies with names like Utah Scientific, Cephalon, and Compeq. With the vigorous help of Senator Orrin G. Hatch, a principal sponsor of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, the area has become a magnet for supplement companies. Hatch has been the industry's greatest champion and has consistently fought tighter regulations on products like ephedra. (So has his son, Scott, who has earned millions of dollars for firms that lobby on behalf of supplement companies.)

Arriving early for my meetings, I waited in the lobby, which was festooned with flyers and advertisements for a stupefying variety of herbal tonics and miracle cures. A banner bearing the company motto—"We help people feel great about themselves"—was stretched across an open bullpen area where dozens of salespeople worked the phones. Basic has a remarkably high "closure" rate; more than sixty per



"Sometimes I worry I'm a wolf dressed as me."

cent of callers make a purchase. An advertisement for Zantrex-3 on the wall declared, "Dietary Supplement Industry Pinning Hopes on New 'Super Stimulant,' Non-Ephedra Diet Pill. Decline in Ephedra Diet Pill Sales Reversed by Zantrex™-3's Sudden Popularity."

Basic puts out scores of products, which are marketed under the names of nearly a dozen companies—a practice that, according to Dennis Gay, the president and C.E.O., is intended to confuse competitors and "protect our brands in the Wild West atmosphere that exists today in the supplement industry." With Zantrex-3, Basic has seized cleverly on the fears about ephedra—marketing the pills as the "high-tech" substitute. But the company has many similar products; the cynically named Anorex, for example, is "the first weight-control compound designed to mitigate the profound effect that variations in the human genetic code have on the storage, use, and disposition of body fat," and Relacore is the "most significant weight-control advancement in more than a decade." ("Excess tummy flab is not your fault.") There is also Sövage Breast Augmentation Serum, a topically applied bust cream ("Yes They Are Real Breasts," one highly illustrative ad says), and Sövage Lip Plumper, to increase the fullness of one's lips. The company also markets tummy gels that promise "ripped abs" (NutraSport Cutting Gel), and a variety of tonics to help one think, relax, or sleep more soundly.

One product, Strivectin-sd, a cream that is sold for more than a hundred dollars a tube in Nordstrom, Lord & Taylor, and other stores, is made by a company called Klein-Becker USA, which calls itself "the industry leader in providing patented and exclusive weight-control and life-enhancement products that meet your individual needs." There is, however, neither a Klein nor a Becker, nor are there any specific employees who work there. Like Zoller Labs, it's a company created by Basic because the name sounds impressive and pharmaceutical. Strivectin was originally intended for use by women to reduce stretch marks (and in many stores it is still marketed that way), but people soon began to rub it on their faces as well; Strivectin now asks, without any data to justify the comparison or the question, "Even better than Botox?"

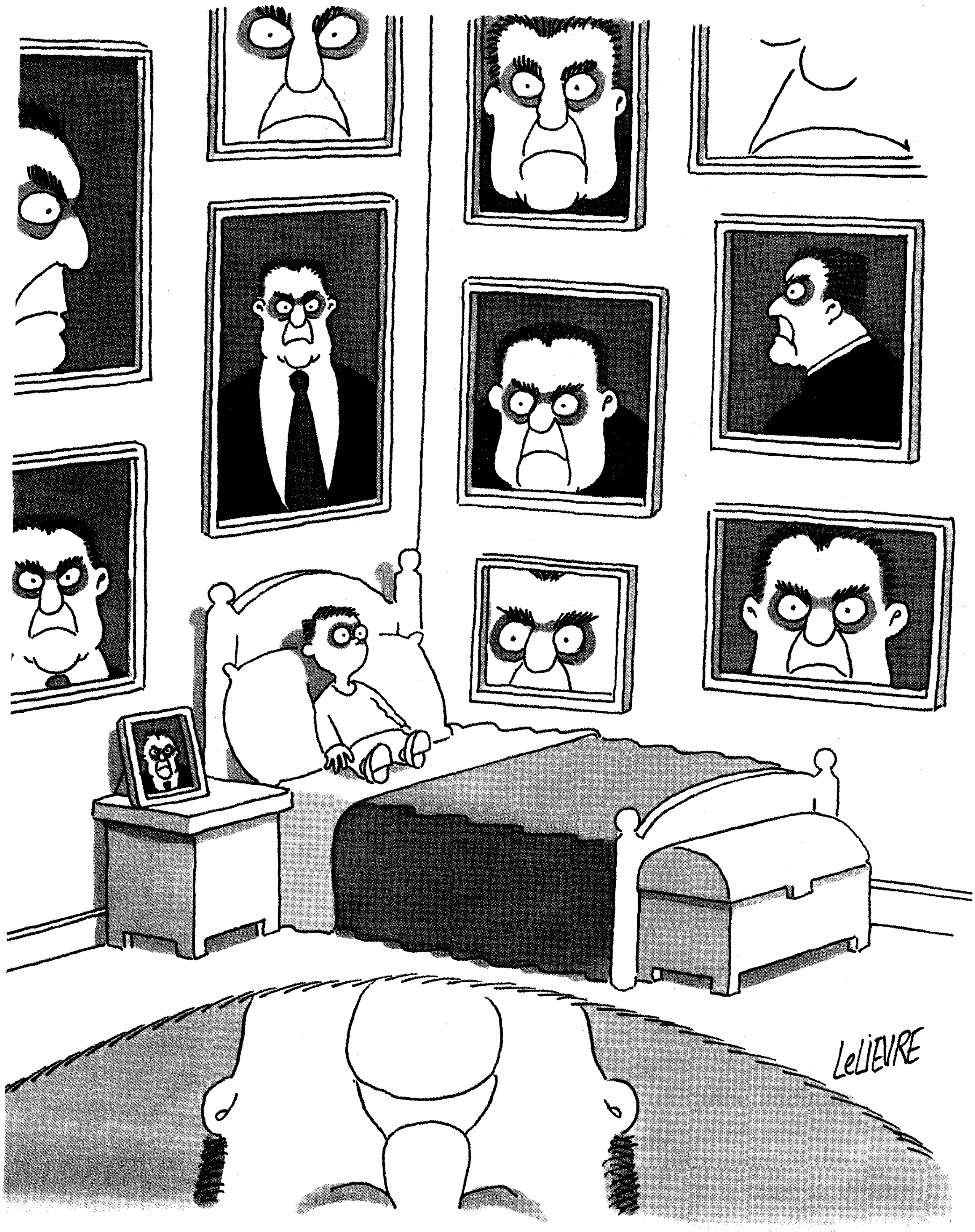
Daniel B. Mowrey, the man responsible for creating most of these products, is a gentle-looking figure with blue eyes and gray hair that is thinning at the top. The day I met him, he was dressed in chinos, a denim work shirt, sneakers, and a loud paisley tie. "I used to be a hippie," he said, shrugging, when he saw me staring at the tie. He told me he bought it long ago in Haight Ashbury. Mowrey is the director of scientific affairs at Basic and one of the three owners. Everyone calls him Dr. Dan. He received a Ph.D. in psychology from Brigham Young University, and although he never studied botany formally, he has written widely on the medicinal uses of herbs. He laid out his philosophy quite clearly in his book "The Scientific Validation of Herbal Medicine," published in 1986:

> The scientific method is a powerful tool, but it has its limits. . . . Medical science in America is a unique combination of economic and political factors, which fuse together almost religiously to promote synthesized, highly active chemicals.

Mowrey told me he believes that there is almost always a "natural" alternative to synthetic drugs: "One that is cheaper, safer, and, often, more effective."

Mowrey came up with the components of Zantrex-3 the way he comes up with the elements of most of the company's products: by surfing the Internet. "I never understand why my competitors don't spend more time just looking at the information on the Web," he told me. "It's all out there," he said, showing me how he uses public databases—such as those kept by the National Institutes of Health—to see what's new in fields like weight control, memory, and aging.

Basic makes two major claims for Zantrex-3: that it will provide an immediate and sustained burst of energy, and that it will help people lose weight rapidly. For the first claim, Mowrey relied on a study by the U.S. military that examined the effects of caffeine on Navy SEALs who had been deprived of sleep and exposed to the extreme stresses of a training week. The study concluded that it is more effective in combatting fatigue than a placebo. One dose of Zantrex-3 is like drinking four cups of strong coffee. Whatever the merits of that study, al-



"I put them up after the divorce so he knows his father is still a part of his life."

most anyone who takes the pills is sure to feel the jolt—and many people buy them for that reason alone. (The clerk at my local G.N.C. warned me to take the pill with food, or I might get "too high.")

The company attaches a tiny brochure to the neck of each bottle which says that Zantrex-3 caused "546 per cent more weight loss" than America's No. 1 ephedrine-based diet pill—"without diet and exercise." It goes on, "Published clinical studies don't lie." I asked Mowrey to show me the data he used to arrive at that figure. He acknowledged that the figure was based not on a direct comparison of the two diet products but on extrapolations of results from unrelated studies.

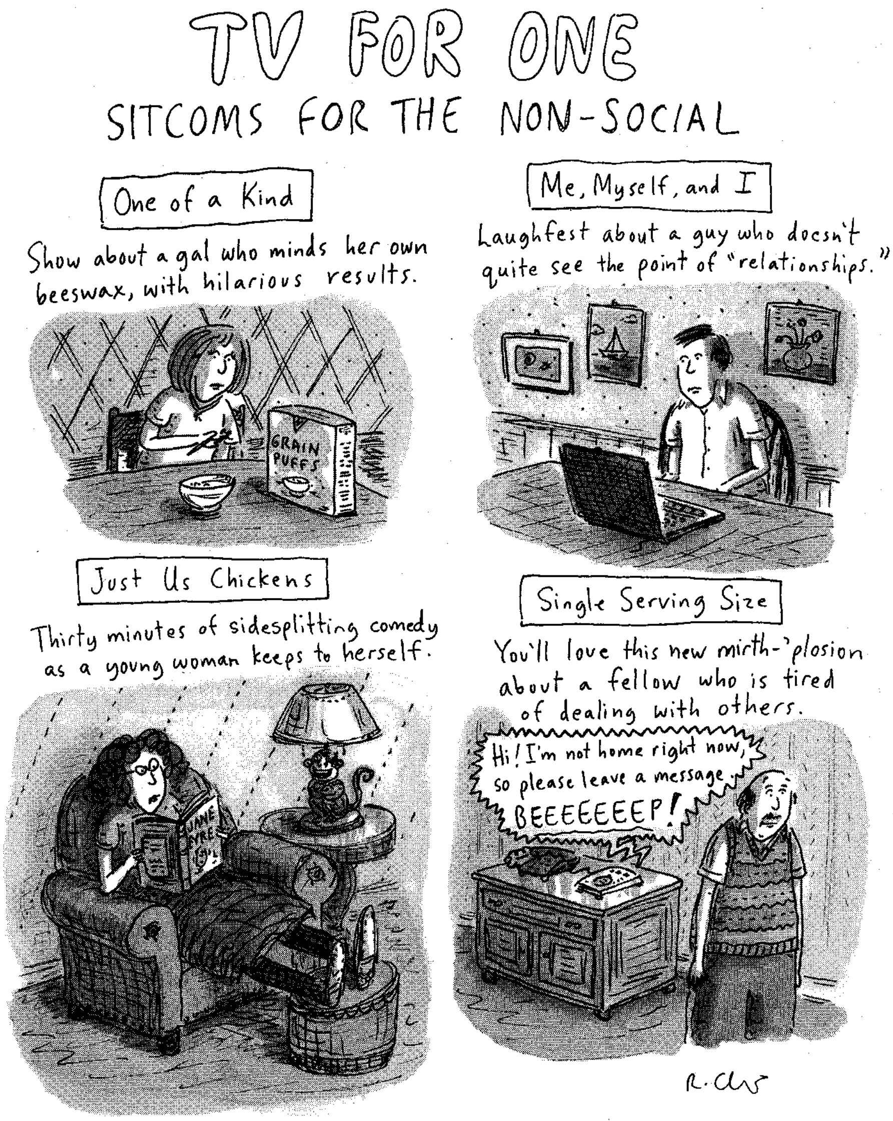
One of the studies, which Mowrey describes as a "groundbreaking" paper, published in 2001 by two Danish researchers in the British *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, evaluated the effectiveness of a mixture of three South American herbs—now used in Zantrex-3—in aiding weight loss by making people feel too full to eat. The study followed forty-six subjects for forty-five days. Half were given a placebo and the others received the herbal mix. At the end of the study, the herbal group had lost eleven pounds, on average, whereas the other group had lost less than one. Seven participants were followed for another year, during which they neither gained nor lost more weight.

The subject of obesity, after being largely ignored by the medical establishment, has finally gained currency in the United States, and many major medical schools and scientific institutes now are pouring research money into the field. Yet, despite thousands of weight-loss studies and an increasingly focussed search for solutions, there is no evidence that any prescription, over-the-counter product, or supplement has ever kept a person's weight down for much more than a few months. At best, such drugs or supplements are short-term answers to lifelong problems; at worst, they intensify the disorders they attempt to cure. I asked Mowrey if it was fair to assert, as he has, that "whether weight management or energy management is your goal, Zantrex-3 represents the very best options available anywhere."

"What options are better?" he asked. "We have to look at the study. We are not free to go beyond it, but it's not fair to ignore it, either."

Losing eleven pounds in forty-five days certainly sounds promising, but the results of a single six-week study involving fewer than fifty people would almost never provide enough meaningful data to prove the value of a drug or supplement of any kind. It usually takes years and involves hundreds, if not thousands, of subjects before a study of a new drug can yield clear evidence that it is effective. The main herbs in Zantrex-3—guarana, yerba maté, and damiana, coupled with caffeine, zanthene, and green tea, among other ingredients—are stimulants, laxatives, and diuretics. You do not need a degree in nutritional sciences to realize that if you take a combination of stimulants, laxatives, and diuretics for six weeks you are going to lose weight, or to know that, over the long run, such a diet plan is certain to fail. "The idea that a pill, a mixture of herbs, or anything else will allow people to lose weight and keep it off without any other effort is completely ridiculous," Kelly Brownell told me when I called to ask his opinion of Zantrex-3. Dr. Brownell is the chairman of the psychology department at Yale, and he is also the director of the Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders. "You look at a study that, in the end, followed seven people for a year and you can conclude nothing from that."

Mowrey argues that Americans ought to have the chance to make decisions about the value of supplements for themselves. "There are a lot of pharmaceuticals derived from plants," he said. "Lots of times, the safety issues are not important. And you have to remember what you have to do if you develop a drug


TV FOR ONE
SITCOMS FOR THE NON-SOCIAL
One of a Kind
Show about a gal who minds her own beeswax, with hilarious results.
GRAIN PUFFS
Me, Myself, and I
Laughfest about a guy who doesn't quite see the point of "relationships."
Just Us Chickens
Thirty minutes of sidesplitting comedy as a young woman keeps to herself.
JANE EYRE
Single Serving Size
You'll love this new mirth-'plosion about a fellow who is tired of dealing with others.
Hi! I'm not home right now, so please leave a message BEEEEEEEP!

today. Say you do a small study of maybe a hundred and fifty people and you find that as a result of the study eighty-five of the women who take this who would otherwise get breast cancer don't. The F.D.A. demands that the company spend several billion dollars and fifteen years of research answering every little question that comes along. Every nitpicky little question. Now, how many people have you *killed* before you introduce this drug to the market?

"Drug companies don't offer money-back guarantees," he continued, emphasizing one of Basic's main policies. "We do. And if it isn't going to work, if it's not effective, then we have the ability to give money back. There is satisfaction guaranteed here. Can you imagine a drug company doing that? We are in the business of wellness, not of curing sick people. A lot of dietary supplements are designed to prevent problems from ever happening. There is no drug that is going to prevent illness. Drugs treat illness. They are going to be very, very invasive. Whereas dietary supplements are not invasive. You can combine vitamins with minerals and plants together in a thousand ways without anything happening that is bad."

The notion that herbal combinations are "natural" and therefore can't cause harm serves as a first principle for many people who take supplements as a solution to their medical problems. Even the most seemingly benign substances, however, can turn out to have significant and wholly unexpected effects. Perhaps the best example is grapefruit juice, which can disrupt the work of a series of enzymes that are found in the small intestine and which serve to break down drugs before they are absorbed into the bloodstream. Taking medicine with grapefruit juice permits it to enter the bloodstream in dangerously high concentrations, which keeps it from doing its job and can intensify many side effects. Many common pharmaceuticals—including antidepressants, antihistamines, and cholesterol medications—are not metabolized properly if they are taken with grapefruit juice.

There are numerous examples of herbs, drugs, and supplements that cause reactions or that when taken together are harmful. Beta-carotene, found in carrots, has always been considered purely beneficial, yet recent research has shown that, for men with certain types of cancer, those who took beta-carotene supplements had a significantly worse prognosis than those who did not. There is a scientific maxim that the dose makes the poison—that any substance, no matter how useful, can cause trouble if you take too much of it. Most physicians don't even know what supplements their patients are taking, let alone how much, so trying to warn people about possible interactions among them is impossible. "The remedy for all this is to stop dangerously pretending that pharmacologically active substances called dietary supplements should be treated completely differently from pharmacologically active substances called drugs," Sidney Wolfe, the director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group, told me. "You cannot determine if they are safe or effective without doing the studies. And with supplements the studies are almost never done."

Some herbs do work, of course, yet the absence of effective manufacturing standards in the United States means that even then consumers can't rely on commercial formulas. Black cohosh has been used for centuries to treat a variety of common ailments, including, most recently, menstrual and menopausal problems. In Europe, it is considered a drug—and many studies have shown that it can have value. Women often take some form of the root instead of using hormone-replacement therapy. Still, in the U.S. the herbal product that you buy tomorrow may be different biologically from the same product purchased next month. I have a friend who, at the onset of menopause, began to use a supplement that is composed principally of black cohosh. For several months, her symptoms disappeared. One day, however, she bought a new bottle, and within a week her symptoms had returned so severely that she called her doctor from a car on the West Side Highway. "I demanded a prescription for hormone-replacement therapy," she told me, even though she considers it dangerous. Her doctor guessed correctly that she had just bought a new bottle of the supplement, and advised her to switch to a different product containing black cohosh—Remifemin—which is made, by Shaper & Brunner, in Germany, where it is regulated as a drug.

With herbal products made in the U.S., however, there is simply no way to know what you are getting in each bottle. In 2002, researchers at the New York Botanical Garden published a study in the journal *Economic Botany* in which they reported on using DNA-fingerprinting techniques to identify several species of black cohosh. They found great variation in the herbal mixtures that were turned into products for the marketplace. It's hard to make a botanical product exactly the same way every time. Without rules, there is almost no incentive to try.

Since the standards for making diet pills are set largely by the people who sell them, I decided it would be useful to see how Zantrex-3 was made. "You go look at the factory," Dennis Gay told me. "If you think we are a sleazy operation, remember: we could do it for half the price." The next day, I drove to Cornerstone Nutritional Labs, in Farmington, about twenty minutes north of Salt Lake City on I-15. Cornerstone, an independent company that produces most of the Zantrex-3 sold in the U.S., pumped out 1.7 billion capsules, tablets, and pills last year, nearly two hundred thousand an hour for every hour of every day. I was greeted warmly by Brent Davis, Cornerstone's director of nutraceutical sales, who offered to show me around the plant. We slipped on disposable booties, gowns, and hairnets, and removed the metal from our pockets, so as not to contaminate the materials. Our first stop was the receiving area at the plant's loading dock, where dozens of fifty-kilogram drums of raw herbs—green tea, yerba maté, and pangea among them—were lined up and stacked nearly to the ceiling, forty feet high. As soon as the herbs arrive at the factory, they are sampled for color, consistency, density, and purity. The raw materials are then taken to a weighing room, where they are collected by men in moon suits and sampled again. Most of the machines sit in clean rooms adjacent to the factory floor, cordoned off by walls of double-paned glass.

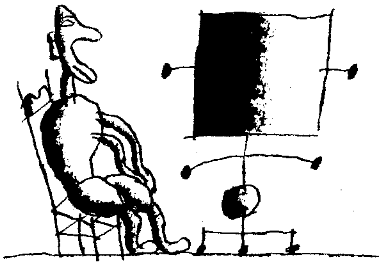
After the herbs are collected, they are mixed in a blender. This is not as easy as it might appear; natural organic compounds are far harder to combine than synthetically made drugs. A product like Vitamin E comes in tiny balls, and most herbs come in flakes. The same herb can vary in consistency, in provenance, and even, at times, in species. Some need water; others are ruined by the slightest exposure to moisture. Some supplements require a minute amount of an ingredient—less than a hundred and fifty micrograms, for instance—to be mixed evenly into more than a hundred cubic feet of powder. And each supplement must be made in such a way that every capsule in every bottle is identical in quality and strength. "It's a hell of a job to do," said Michael Meade, the director of operations for Basic Research, who was also on the tour. "There's a recipe, and once it's worked out it's fine. But it takes time to get it right, and many companies fail. The idea that you just throw it all into the soup and wait is ridiculous." He said that Cornerstone was unusually rigorous in its testing, and that Basic was pleased by the consistency of the results.

Like other manufacturers in the secretive and, for the most part, privately owned supplement industry, Cornerstone declines to talk about its revenues or even name its clients. (Basic Research, too, reveals almost nothing about its earnings, expenditures, plans, or goals.) But Zantrex-3 is obviously a big part of Cornerstone's current business. The factory's largest blender, which was given over completely to the production of Zantrex-3 when I was there, can turn five thousand kilograms of raw powder into the equivalent of fifteen million pills a day. As soon as the newly homogenized herbal material leaves the blender, it is pressed by another machine into blue capsules, which are dumped into giant drums—thirty-five thousand capsules in each drum. They are then collected in a hopper and fed into bottles.

Cornerstone's computer system monitors every gram as it passes down the line, and supervisors keep the floors spotless. Once the bottles are filled, they are capped and a tamper-proof seal is melted on. Labels are applied by the same machine. Finally, one of the brochures advertising Zantrex-3's "amazing power" is fastened by hand to the neck of every bottle on the assembly line. From there, the bottles are packed into boxes that are loaded into cartons, which are shrink-wrapped and ready to ship. If Basic Research were willing to cut a (totally legal) corner or two, there is no doubt that it could produce those pills for far less money.

When I left Cornerstone, I drove to a nearby Wal-Mart, which, along with such stores as Circuit City and Bed Bath & Beyond, anchors a mall in a suburb of Salt Lake City called Murray. Wal-Mart is the biggest of what Gay refers to as the "big boxes," the giant chains that can insure a product's success simply by stocking it. By summer, all four thousand Wal-Mart stores will carry Zantrex-3; many of them will feature displays with the tango-dancing couple that I had noticed on the subway in New York.

The Murray Wal-Mart has an extensive section devoted to supplements of all kinds: bottles, packets, and cartons promising the usual array of unproved benefits, and promoting the health of the eyes, the skeletal system, the urinary tract, the brain. A tiny asterisk appeared on every product—including Zantrex-3—that suggested a connection between its contents and better health: "This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease." If a product whose label promotes it as contributing to "wellness" is not intended to cure, treat, diagnose, or even prevent any health problem, what, one has to wonder, is it supposed to do? But there they all are, dozens of brands: Stacker 3, with chitosan, and Starch Away, which "blocks calories from bread, pasta, pastries and other foods" ("Dieting has never been easier," the bottle says). Zantrex was for sale, along with ZN-3, a new product that advertises itself on the label as being like Zantrex. It has the same ingredients and costs half as much, but, since only the *names* of ingredients are listed, not the amounts, what comes in each capsule is anybody's guess.



As I walked out of the store, I heard an announcement on the loudspeaker: "Welcome, shoppers. Right now at the McDonald's inside this Wal-Mart you can get two cheeseburgers for only one dollar. This offer is for a limited time only. Also at this McDonald's we accept MasterCard and Visa."

Dennis Gay is a fifty-seven-year-old, pear-shaped man who has been waging an unsuccessful war on his weight for years. The first time I met with him, he was dressed in shades of green: olive pants, pale, pine-colored shirt, and loden tie. He had a short, neatly trimmed graying beard. At that meeting, Gay was accompanied by a man who was described as a "consultant" but who obviously played a significant role in the company, because he did most of the talking. (Nearly every time I asked Gay a question, he deferred to his colleague.) The man spoke fast, and had a New York accent. He didn't give me his name, although I asked him for it three times.

I wondered whether Basic Research believed that new laws requiring more regulation and stricter standards would be bad for the industry. "They are simply not needed," the man who wouldn't identify himself blurted out. "The F.D.A. has the authority to act today if it wants to remove something from the market. But it always prefers to use the media." He went on to say that although he assumed that ephedra would be banned there were really no significant problems with the herb, which Basic Research continues to sell, and which its salespeople told me on the telephone was the "best way by far to lose that weight fast." He said that Zantrex-3 increased "metabolism without increasing the heart rate or blood pressure"—which, as it happens, is almost never the case.

After the interview, I learned that the man's name was Mitchell K. Friedlander, and that he had made false claims about diet pills, and in the nineteen-eighties was prohibited by the U.S. Postal Service from selling them through the mail.

CUSTOMER SERVICE
HOURS
B. Smaller

"In the store it was kitschy—in my apartment it was tacky."

When I spoke to Gay a second time, Friedlander was not there. I said it was hard to ignore the fact that his most trusted adviser—Gay described him to me as a "marketing genius"—had been found to have made false claims about diet pills. Gay told me that he had hired a private investigator to "check Mitch out" and that he was comfortable with the report. "Mitch is valuable," Gay said. "He doesn't desire to become a part of the company, and I don't think we want him to be." I asked if working with a man with Friedlander's past bothered him, since he was trying to establish Basic Research as one of the more reputable companies in an extremely irregular business.

"Remember the old days when the banks hired safecrackers to protect them?" Gay said. "Is this that different? What are the standards in this industry? Tell me what they are, because I really wish I knew, so that I could abide by them. We try to do better, but there are no clear rules. None." He went on, "We would welcome standards as long as they don't take the choice away from the public. I wouldn't welcome the standards that exist on the drug side. Because then you have no choice. And the American consumer is not stupid. He deserves to make his own mind up about what he does."

This is Gay's bottom line, and that of the industry as well. "I have to get into my lecture," he said, and walked over to a whiteboard in the office. "Let's say I've got ninety-nine people that have a fatal form of cancer. The way the F.D.A. regulates drugs now, a study would typically look like this." He drew three big circles and wrote the number thirty-three in each of them. "A third will get nothing, and they are going to die. Then another thirty-three we are going to give a placebo. The last third get the active ingredient they are testing as a new drug.

"Let's assume the first thirty-three die. What about placebo? Well, most studies show that placebo survival rate is thirty-six per cent. That suggests that eleven of the people on placebo will survive at least long enough to be significant. And now let's say that of the third who receive the active ingredient eleven survive. Based on today's regulations, that drug would not be approved. It's no better than placebo. And it would be tossed in the trash. But this is what I want to ask: What about these twenty-two people here?" Gay drew a big line under the eleven placebo and eleven drug recipients who, in his reckoning, would have lived. "What the government of the United States says is that those twenty-two people don't have the benefit of a placebo or of the active ingredient. So you have zero people surviving out of ninety-nine when you could have had twenty-two surviving." Gay looked mournful. "All I am saying is that I want to have the right to appeal to those twenty-two people. I want to give them a chance to live."

There is a demonstrable placebo effect in most clinical studies, although the idea that placebo could save even eleven patients with fatal cancer is ludicrous. But Gay and Basic make their money by selling the dream of wellness, not the reality. If their products could really swell breasts, banish wrinkles, and erase fat, Basic would probably become the most successful company in American history. After all, is Zantrex-3 any different from Lydia Pinkham's miraculous concoctions?

This year, Congress will consider a bill that would modify the 1994 law so that thousands of unregulated botanical substances would be treated more like drugs than like foods. Supplement manufacturers—and their customers—are preparing to fight any such change with every resource they can muster. The bill has been advertised as an assault on the First Amendment. The alarm has sounded across the Internet, and congressional offices have been besieged with protests. Walk into any health-food store and you'll see leaflets warning that the government is about to deny you the right to choose your own fate.

Gay went back to his chair and sat silently for a moment. "We put disclaimers in our ads, and we give people the results of the studies and a money-back guarantee," he said. "What more could you want? Don't prevent people from using their own judgment. Let them try it. If it doesn't work, they can return it. That's fair. That's what's American." ♦

FICTION

DELICATE WIVES

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Veronica Horst was stung by a bee, and it should have produced no more than a minute of annoyance and pain, but she, in the apparent bloom of health at the age of twenty-nine, turned out to be susceptible to anaphylactic shock, and nearly died. Fortunately, her husband, Gregor, was with her, and threw her fainting body, all but blood-pressureless, into their car and speeded careening through the heart of town to the hospital, where she was saved. When Les Miller heard about the event, from his wife, Lisa, who was breathlessly fresh from a session of gossip and women's tennis, he was stung by jealousy: he and Veronica had had an affair the previous summer, and by the rights of love he should have been the one to be with her and to save her heroically. Gregor even had the presence of mind, afterward, to go around to the local police and explain why he had been speeding and careening through stop signs. "It seems incredible," Lisa innocently told her husband, "that here she's nearly thirty and apparently has never been stung before, so nobody knew she would react this way. As a child I was always getting stung, weren't you?"

"I think Veronica had a city upbringing," he said.

"Still," Lisa said, hesitant in the face of his ready assertion, "that's no guarantee. There are parks."

Les, picturing Veronica in her house, in her bed, where an elongated pink-tinged pallor had been revealed to him, like a Modigliani or a Fragonard, nestled in rumpled fabric, said, "She's a pretty indoor kind of person."

Lisa was not. Tennis, golf, hiking, and skiing kept her freckled the year round. Even her delft-blue irises were dotted, if you looked, with tan specks of melanin. She insisted, "Well, she nearly died," as if Les had been wandering from the point. His mind had been exploring the abysmal possibility of Veronica's beauty and high spirits being removed from the world by a chemical mischance. In her moment of need, had her care passed to her lover the previous summer, he might have proved less effective than Gregor, who was small and dark and spoke English if not with an accent with a studied precision, as if locking the sense of his words into an iron case. She found him repellent, Veronica had confessed—his fussiness, his dictatorial streak, the cold assertiveness in his touch—but Les, by breaking off their affair at the end of the summer, had possibly saved her life. In Gregor's shoes he might have panicked, doubted what was happening, and fatally failed to act. As it was, he saw gallingly, the incident would be rolled into the Horst family annals, as a pivotal and eternally ramifying moment—the time Mommy (and, as she would become, Grammy) was stung by a bee, and funny foreign-born Grampa resourcefully saved her. Les was so jealous that he nearly bent over as if with a stomach cramp. Had he, sweet dreamy Les, been there, instead of scowling, practical-minded Gregor, her emergency would have acquired and forever retained a different poetry, more flattering to her, more congruent with a doomed summer love. For what was more majestically intimate even than sex but death? He imagined her motionless profile, gray with blood loss, cradled in his arms.

Veronica had a favorite summer dress, with a wide oval neck and half-length sleeves, of orange, orange distributed with a tie-dyed unevenness. It was not a color most women would wear, but it brought out the reckless gleam in her long straight hair and the green of her eyes. Remembering their affair, Les seemed to squint through a wash of this color, though it was no longer summer but September when they parted, the grass in the fields going to seed and the air noisy with cicadas. Veronica's eyes watered, her lower lip trembled as she listened. He explained that he just couldn't face leaving Lisa and the kids, who were still almost babies, and unless he could they should break it off while it was still secret, before things got messy, and all their lives lay scattered and ruined. Through her tears Veronica appraised him and determined that indeed he did not love her enough to rescue her from Gregor. He was not free enough, was how he preferred to phrase it. They wept together—his tears made a gleam on the skin of her shoulder within the wide oval of her neckline—and agreed that no one but them would ever know.

And yet, through the fall and winter and into the next summer, he felt cheated by this secrecy; their affair had been something wonderful he wanted known. He tried to rekindle her attention. She ignored his longing looks, and rebuked his confused attempts to single her out in a crowd. Her green eyes glared, under the frown of her long reddish eyebrows. "Les dear," she said to him once when he cornered her late at a party, "did you ever hear the expression 'Shit or get off the pot'?"

"Well, I have now," he said, shocked and offended. Lisa would never have said such a thing, any more than she would have worn splashy tie-dyed orange.

His concealed affair with Veronica burned within him like an untreated infection, and as the years went by it seemed that Veronica, too, suffered from it; she seemed never to have quite recovered from the bee sting. Weight loss, making her look gaunt and stringy, alternated with periods of puffiness and overweight. There were trips to the local hospital, about which Gregor was adamantly mysterious, and spells when Veronica was hidden within her house, suffering from complaints that her husband, showing up at parties by himself, refused to name. Les, in his inert, romantic way, imagined her, having in a fit of treacherous weakness confessed their affair to Gregor, being held captive by him. Or else regret over losing Les was gnawing at her delicate constitution. Her beauty did not greatly suffer from her frailty, but gained a new dimension from it, a ghostly glow, a poignance. After years of sunbathing—all women did it back then—Veronica developed photosensitivity, and stayed pale all summer. Her teeth, as her thirties wore on, gave her trouble, and the orthodontics and periodontics specialists she regularly consulted had their offices in the nearby middle-sized city, in a tall building across from the one in which Les worked as an investment counsellor.

Once, he glimpsed her from his window as she reported, preoccupied and solemn in a dark, wide-skirted cloth coat, for treatment across the street. After that, he kept looking out his window for her, mourning the decade they had let slip by while married to other people. Lisa's outdoor bounce and freckled good nature had become somewhat butch; her hair, like her mother's, turned gray early. Gregor was rumored to be discontented and having affairs. Les imagined these betrayals as wounds Veronica was enduring, within the silent prison of her marriage. He still saw her at parties, but across the room, and, when he did maneuver close to her, she had little to say. During

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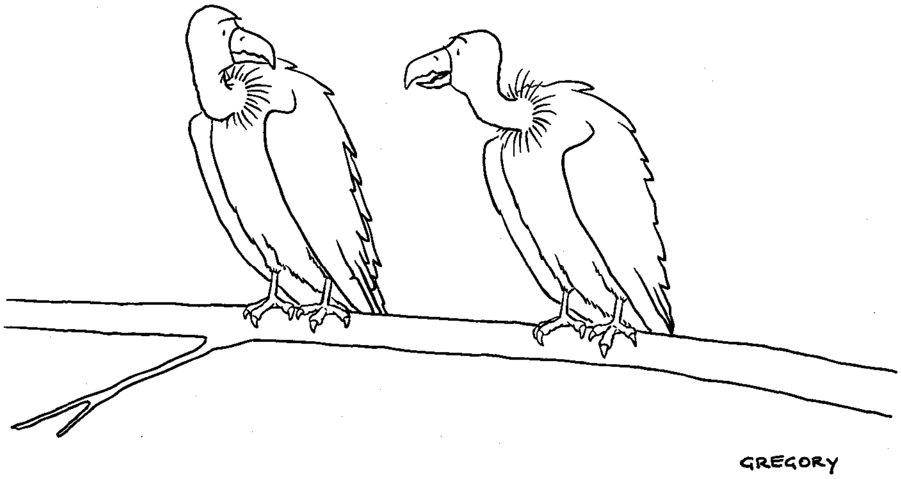

"Sure, I'd like fresh meat, but it's hard to argue with carrion's convenience and affordability."

• •

their affair they had shared, along with sex, concerns about their children, and memories of their parents and upbringings. This sort of innocent exposure of another, eagerly apprehended life figures among the things lovers lose, a flow of blameless confidences that, halted, builds up a pressure.

So when he spotted Veronica leaving the dentists' building, unmistakably her although he was ten stories high and she was bundled against the winter winds, he left his office without bothering with a topcoat and ambushed her on the sidewalk a half block away.

"Lester! What on earth?" She put her mittened hands on her hips to mime exasperation. Christmas decorations were still in some shop windows, gathering dust, and tinsel rain from trashed evergreens glittered in the gutters.

"Let's have lunch," he begged. "Or is your mouth too full of Novocain?"

"He didn't use Novocain today," she primly told him. "It was just the fitting of a crown, with temporary cement."

The detail thrilled him. In the warmth of a booth in his favorite weekday lunch place, he marvelled at her presence across the table. She had reluctantly removed her dark wool overcoat, revealing a red cardigan and a necklace of pink costume pearls. "So how have you been these many years?" he asked.

"Why are we doing this?" she asked. "Don't the people in here all know you?"

They had arrived early, but the place was filling up, with noise and little sharp drafts as the door opened and closed. "They do and they don't," he said, "but what the hell, what's to be afraid of? You could be a client. You could be an old friend. Which you are. How's your health?"

"Fine," she said, which he knew to be a lie.

But he went on, "And your children? I miss hearing about them—there was the rough-and-tumble one, and the sensitive shy one, who you couldn't stand some days."

"That was ages ago," Veronica said. "I can stand Janet now. She and her brother are both at boarding school."

"Remember how we used to have to work around them? Remember the time you sent Harry off to school even though he had a fever, because you and I had a date set up?"

"I'd forgotten that. I'd prefer not to be reminded; it makes me ashamed now. We were foolish and heedless, and you were right to break it off. It's taken a while for me to understand that, but I do."

"Well, I don't. I was crazy to give you up. I exaggerated my own importance. Kids—mine are teen-agers now, too, and away at school. I look at them and wonder if they ever gave a damn."

"Of course they did, Lester." She cast her eyes down, toward the cup of hot tea she had ordered, though he had pressed her to have, like him, a real drink. "You were right: don't make me say it again."

"Yeah, but, right now, it feels desperately wrong."

"If you flirt with me, I'll have to leave." This threat provoked a long chain of thought in Veronica that led to her saying solemnly, "Gregor and I are getting a divorce."

"Oh, no!" Les felt as if the air had thickened, pressing like pillows in his face. "Why?"

She shrugged, and grew very still over her cup of tea, like a card player guarding her hand. "He says I can't keep up with him anymore."

"Really? What a selfish, narcissistic creep! Remember how you used to complain about his icy touch?"

She repeated the almost imperceptible shrug. "He's a typical man. More honest than most."

Was this a dig at him? Les wondered. In their game of reopened possibilities, he didn't want to overplay his own hand. Rather than say nothing, he said, "With winter here, you don't seem as pale as in summer. How are you doing with sunlight?"

"Since you ask, it makes me ache. I have lupus, they tell me. A mild form, whatever that means." Her grimace he took to be sarcastic.

"Well," Les said, "that's nice it's mild. You still look great to me." The waitress came back, and they hastily ordered, and passed the rest of the lunch uncomfortably, running out of the small talk, the innocent sharing, that for so long he had felt deprived of. The small talk had come, however, in bed, in the languid aftermath of erotic occasions. Veronica was less apt now, Les sensed, to be languid; she carried her wide-hipped, rangy body warily, as if it might detonate. There was something incandescent about her, like a filament forced full of current. Before the waitress could offer them dessert, she reached for her coat and told Les, "Now, don't tell Lisa any of this. Some of it's still secret."

He protested, "I never tell her anything."

But he did tell her, eventually, that perhaps the time had come for them to divorce. His reacquaintance with Veronica—the older, more fragile, and needy Veronica—filled him night and day with her image. In her pallor she had become the entryway to a kind of hospital radiance, a blur of healing, of old wounds repaired. Breaking off their affair had never sat right with him; now he would take care of her for the rest of her life. He saw himself bringing her broth in bed, driving her to tense appointments, becoming almost a doctor himself. The affair was not exactly resumed; their contacts were confined to her dental appointments, since risking anything more might imperil her legal status as a wronged wife. In these lunches and stray drinks she more and more came to resemble the mistress he remembered: carefree in manner, lively and light-voiced in her conversation, with an edge that somehow cut through to his real self, the heroic, debonair self his dull and dutiful life concealed.

"But why?" Lisa asked, of the divorce he vaguely threatened.

He could not confess Veronica's revival in his life, for that would entail confession of the earlier liaison. "Oh," he said, "I think we've pretty much done our work as a couple. I can't keep up with you, frankly. All your sports. You've become self-sufficient, maybe you always were. Think about it. Please. I'm not saying we should start with the lawyers tomorrow."

She was not fooled. Her blue eyes, their gold freckles magnified by small shells of tears, stared. "Does this have anything to do with Veronica and Gregor splitting up?"

"No, of course not, how could it? But they *are* showing how to do it—sensibly, with mutual respect and affection."

"I don't know about affection. People say it's shocking of him to leave her, when she's so sickly."

"*Is* she sickly?" He had thought that the bee sting had opened only to his eyes the extent of her vulnerability, her lovely old-fashioned faintingness.

"Oh, I think so," Lisa said, "though she puts up a good show. Veronica always did."

"See, that's it, show. That's how you think. That's what we've become, a show. All our married life, we've been a show."

"I never felt that. I must say, Les, this is all news to me. I'll need time."

"Of course, dear." There was no hurry; the Horsts were hitting snags, about money. The radiant portal would keep.

And Lisa, that good sport, did seem to adjust, day by day, as the house filled up with the dusty feeling of impending abandonment. The children, peeking in on vacations from school, smelled the difference and took refuge in skiing trips to Utah or rock-climbing expeditions to Vermont. Lisa, on the contrary, seemed to become less and less active; returning from work, Les would find her at home, listless, and when he asked about her day, she would reply, "I don't know where the time went. I didn't do anything, even housework. I have no energy."

One drizzly weekend in early spring, instead of going off to her usual Sunday-morning foursome in the indoor tennis facility, she cancelled and called Les into their bedroom. He had been sleeping in the guest room. "Don't worry, I'm not seducing you," Lisa said, lowering her nightie to expose her breasts, and lying back on the bed with not desire but a kind of laughing fear in her face. "Feel here."

Her pale fingers led his to the underside of her left breast. Instinctively, he pulled his hand back, and she blushed at this rejection and said, "Come on. I can't ask a child to do it, or a friend. You're all I've got. Tell me if you feel anything."

Years of faithful exercise and wearing a jogging bra had kept her body tone firm. Her nipples, the color of watered wine, were erect with their unceremonious exposure to air. "Not just under the skin," she coached him. "Down deeper. Inside."

He didn't know what he felt, in that dark knit of vein and gland. "A lump," she prompted further. "I felt it in the shower ten days ago and kept hoping it was my imagination."

"I . . . I don't know. There's a . . . an inconsistency, but it might be just a naturally dense place."

She put her hand on his and pressed his fingertips deeper. "There. Feel it?"

"Sort of. Does it hurt?"

"I'm not sure it's supposed to. Do the other in the same place. Is it different, or the same?"

He puzzled, shutting his eyes to envision the interior nub, to search out the dark invader. "Not the same, I *think*. I don't know; I can't tell, honey. You should get to a doctor."

"I'm scared to," Lisa confessed, and the blue of her eyes showed it, anxious and bright amid her fading freckles.

Les hung there, one hand still cupping her healthy right breast. It was soft, warm, and heavy. This was the bee sting, the intimacy he had coveted, legitimately his at last; he felt befouled by things of the body and wanted merely to turn away, but knew he could not. ♦

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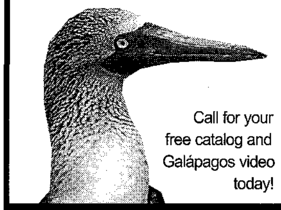

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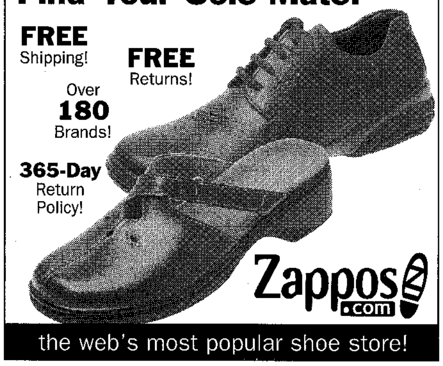

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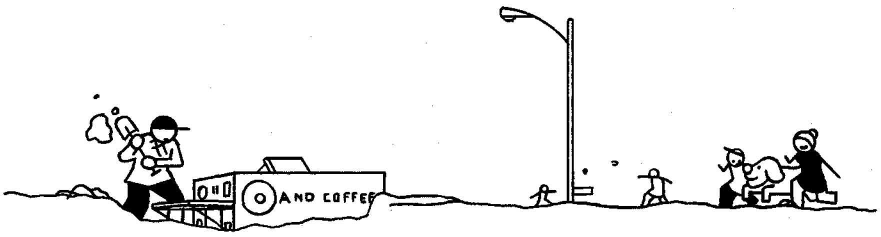
THE CRITICS



ON TELEVISION

L.A. LOVE

"The L Word" brings lesbian life to the small screen.

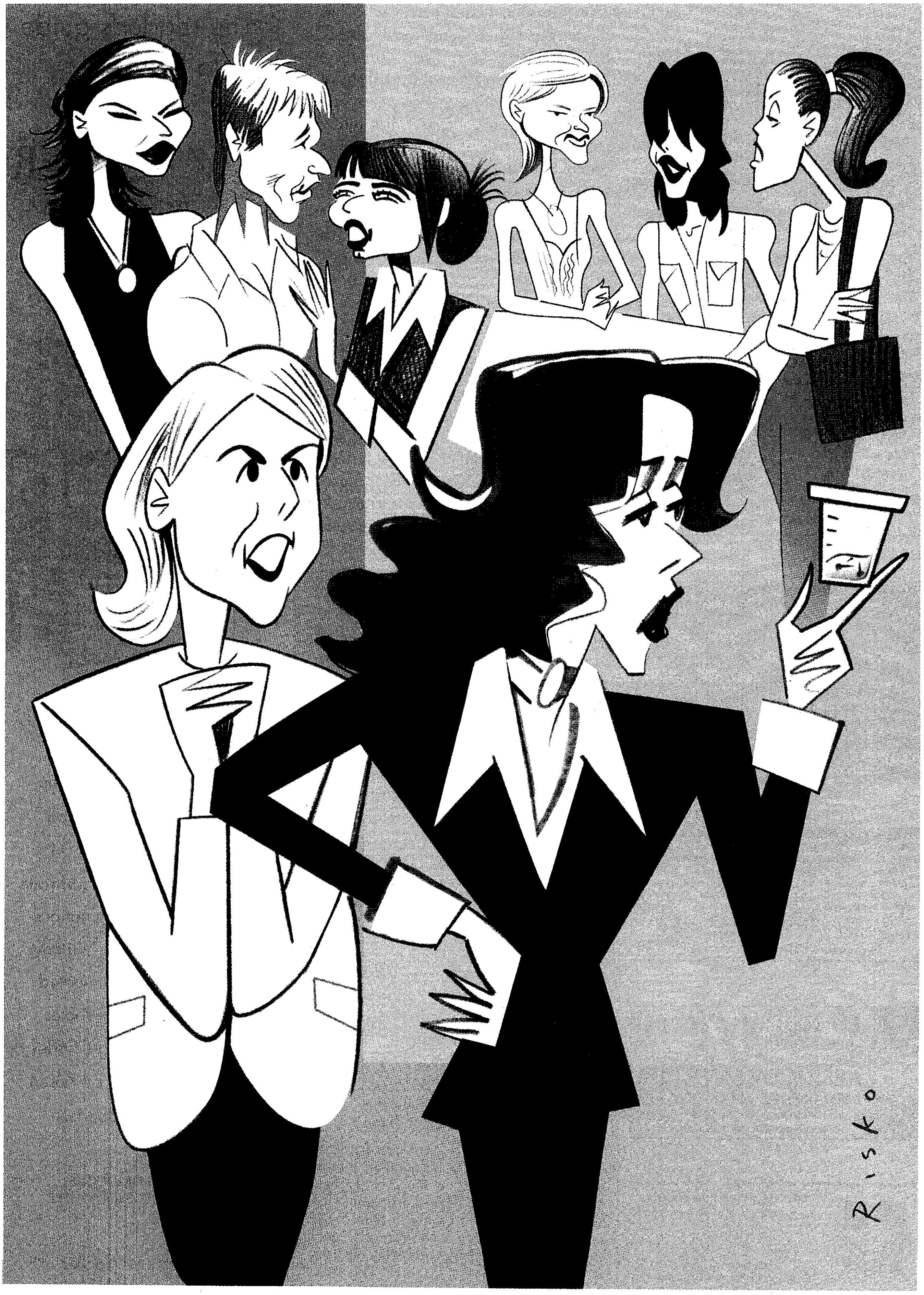
BY NANCY FRANKLIN

"The L Word," the perhaps overpublicized new Sunday-night Showtime series about a group of lesbians who live in Los Angeles, is groundbreaking not because it shows naked women. For that, you can go to an art museum or buy a magazine or turn on your computer (a Google search for "naked men" yields about six hundred thousand results; "naked women" yields more than a million). And it's not because the show depicts women having sex with each other. Any Showtime subscriber who is up after midnight has probably already seen a fair amount of girl-on-girl action, as it's called in the biz. But the late-night Showtime (and Cinemax and HBO) sex is motivated only by a paycheck, and the performers have a hard time even mimicking the expressions of ecstasy. Their job is simply to be on display for their male co-stars, who sit watching from the sidelines, and for the men who sit watching from the comfort of home or hotel rooms. What's different about the sex in "The L Word" is that it isn't staged for the benefit of a viewer: these sisters are doin' it for themselves; they'd be having sex whether anyone was watching or not. And there's a lot of it—so much that it's often predictable and sometimes unintentionally funny. Every time two characters' eyes meet, you think, Here we go again. Even the women in "Sex and the City," whose sexuality sometimes seems cartoonish, occasionally go home alone after a date, but although the women in "The L Word" do have their neuroses and their character flaws, nothing gets in the way of their libidos. This should keep a lot of men glued to the set, assuming they make it past the first lines of dialogue in the first episode: a woman comes into her bathroom and looks at the white plastic stick her partner is holding and says, "You're ovulating," to which her partner replies, "I'm ovulating."

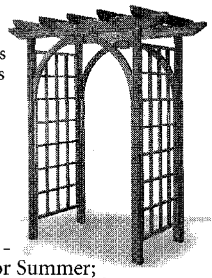
These two women, Tina and Bette (Laurel Holloman and Jennifer Beals), are longtime partners who want to have a baby. They live next door to Tim (Eric Mabius), a former Olympic swimmer and now a university coach, and his newly arrived girlfriend, Jenny (Mia Kirshner), a young fiction writer who has just graduated from college. With the exception of Kit, Bette's older half sister, played by Pam Grier, all the main characters are young, though it's not clear exactly what their ages are—they all have the same low-body-fat, ageless-TV-actor glow, and they could be anywhere from their twenties to their late thirties. (There is one token pale and scrawny character who wears a lot of black and looks like Joan Jett.) Shortly after Jenny arrives, she sees two women having sex in her next-door neighbors' pool, and, fascinated, watches them through the fence. When she tells Tim about it later, they both get turned on, but for Jenny it's the beginning of an unwitting and uncomfortable discovery—that she is sexually drawn to women. After only one real conversation with Marina (Karina Lombard), the sultry, seductive owner of the neighborhood café where all the characters happen to hang out, Jenny, at a party Tina and Bette are having to recruit a sperm donor, lets Marina kiss her. "The L Word," which was created by Ilene Chaiken (who pitched it to Showtime years ago but got a green light only after "Queer as Folk" proved a success), allows Jenny a genuinely complex response to the kiss, and Kirshner is up to the task. Jenny's face when she's with Marina is filled with both fear and joy, and yet it's clear that her feelings for Tim are undiminished—she really loves him, and she can't imagine her future without him. Her doubts about how to proceed with her life affect her writing, and the fact that she is a writer and hyperaware of herself affects her life. (Jenny is one of the few writers I've ever seen portrayed on TV who sound as though they actually cared about language; at one point, she says to Marina, "Every time I look at you, I feel so completely dismantled." It's not a ridiculous ten-dollar word; it's a word that someone who *likes* words would use.)

Chaiken has described "The L Word" as "drama with a lot of humor." While other people have made a lot of claims for "The L Word" and its significance in the realm of sexual politics, the show doesn't make those claims for itself. It doesn't apologize for its characters, nor does it idealize them. One of the humorous tropes of the show is that every character seems to have slept with every other character. Alice (Leisha Hailey), a bisexual journalist who frequents Marina's café, actually keeps a chart showing these connections, and it's as elaborate as a chemistry-class model of a cellulose molecule. (The character at the center of the molecule, the Doña Juana of the group, is the Joan Jett look-alike, Shane, played by Katherine Moennig. Whatever Shane's other attractions may be, she has the worst-looking, most unkempt hair in the history of television.) But the show is also good at delineating the difficulties that gay people have to face, in public and in private. Bette has a rigid, difficult father (Ossie Davis), who doesn't support her in her decision to have a child with Tina. And Dana (Erin Daniels),

ROBERT RISKO



Laurel Holloman, Jennifer Beals, and posse in Showtime's highly publicized new series about lesbian life in L.A.



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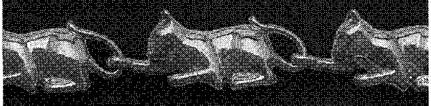

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a professional tennis player who has hidden her sexual orientation to further her career, has to confront her fears about coming out, once she finally has a girlfriend. (Dana has less sexual experience than her friends, and in a funny morning-after scene in the fourth episode we see her lying in bed, dejected, while the woman she just slept with says, "It's nothing to be ashamed of. It happens." Dana, inconsolable, says, "It's never happened to me," and in her humiliation she turns away and hides under the sheets. If this were a scene with a man and a woman, we would know exactly what it was about. Later, we find out what the problem was, and I'll just say it's not what you think, and it's not even, as it turns out, a problem.) Not all the troubles in "The L Word" have to do with the characters' homosexuality, though. Kit, who is a musician, has a checkered history, and an uneasy relationship with Bette. (Grier adds a dimension to the show which would otherwise be missing; she's the only person whose face shows a long acquaintance with disappointment and regret.) Bette, a museum director, is in danger of losing her job. These stresses affect her relationship with Tina, as they would in any marriage.

Over all, "The L Word" is very entertaining; it does have moments that are truly idiotic, but it also has some terrific moments, and the performances are more nuanced than they might have been in other hands. (Rose Troche, who directed and co-wrote "Go Fish," directed the first two episodes.) There are some priceless guest-star turns, including Holland Taylor's, as a wealthy, eccentric art collector. "The L Word" 's ambition is to be low-key, and it succeeds in that regard. Its boldness lies in its implicit assumption that depicting the lives of gay characters on TV is, in the best sense, no big deal. ♦

OUR MISCHIEVOUS TRANSLATORS

From the International Herald Tribune.

Because of a translation error, an article in some editions Thursday misquoted Monica Frassoni, a member of the European Parliament, as comparing Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, to Attila the Hun. Frassoni, who represents a Belgian constituency but who spoke in Italian, said Berlusconi had arrived "alla guida dell'Unione." This was translated as "at the tiller of the union" which was misheard as "Attila."

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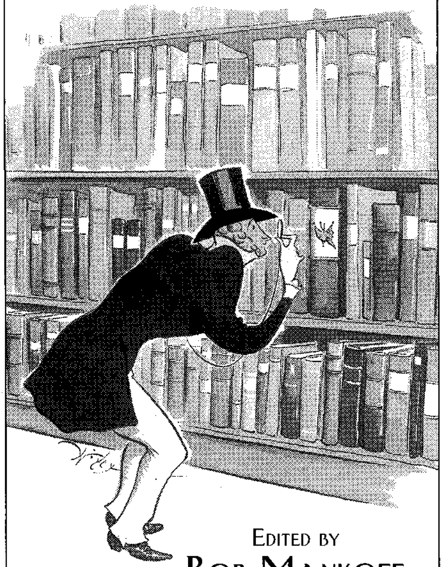

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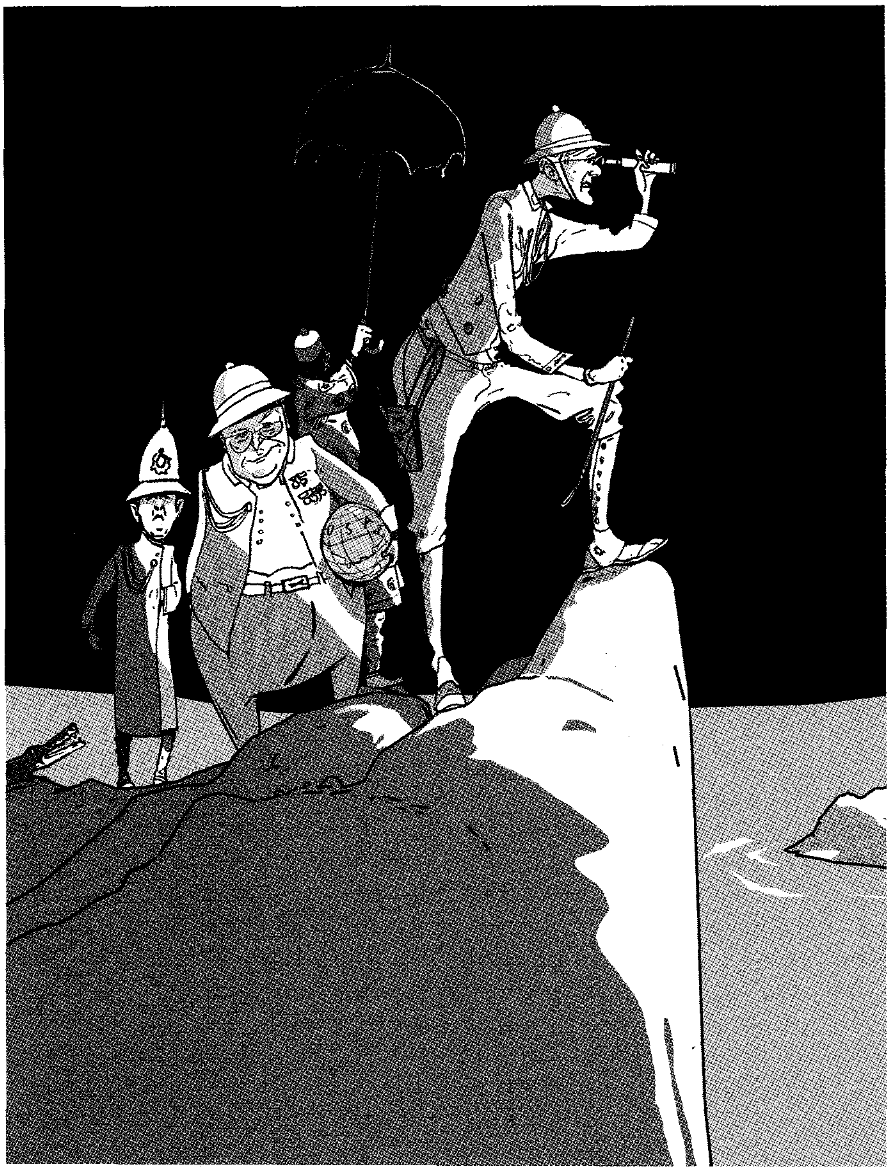
A CRITIC AT LARGE

POWER RANGERS

Did the Bush Administration create a new American empire—or weaken the old one?

BY JOSHUA MICAH MARSHALL



ISTVAN BANYAI

Last March, after Jacques Chirac, the French President, announced that he would veto any new United Nations resolution sanctioning war against Iraq, the White House saw a chance for a different sort of victory. If a majority of the fifteen Security Council members voted for a new resolution and France vetoed it, the United States could claim that the problem was not American unilateralism but French obstructionism. And that hope set the United States scrambling to line up the votes of Chile, Mexico, Pakistan, and a trio of impoverished states from the west coast of Africa. "No matter what the whip count is, we're calling for the vote," President Bush said at a news conference broadcast worldwide on March 6th. "It's time for people to show their cards, let the world know where they stand when it comes to Saddam."

But, apart from Britain, Spain, and Bulgaria, the countries on the Security Council declined to side with the United States. Emissaries threatened and cajoled, to no avail. Pakistan, admittedly, had a restive Muslim population to contend with. But Mexico and Chile said no, too, and so did Cameroon and Guinea and Angola, a country that is heavily dependent on American trade and good will. In the end, Bush didn't call for a vote.

At the time, this moment of mortification received scant attention; the outbreak of war was imminent. It was a curious spectacle, though. No country in the world could stand in the way of America's determination to remove Saddam. But the United States seemed powerless to persuade even the smallest nations to legitimatize its power with a symbolic vote.

As hard-liners in the Bush Administration saw it, the real humiliation was that we had sought the approval of a quarrelsome international body in the first place. During the previous year, a growing number of them had become fascinated with the notion of empire. It was time for America, unabashedly and unilaterally, to assert its supremacy and to maintain global order. The U.N. debacle—the mismatch between our diplomatic sway and our military might—could be taken as confirmation of this view. And yet, if our overtures carried so little weight, just what was the nature of our imperial power?

For leftist critics of America's role in the world, it has long been a baleful article of faith that the United States is an agent of "neo-imperialism," exerting its power through global capital and through organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. After September 11th, a left-wing accusation became a right-wing aspiration: conservatives increasingly began to espouse a world view that was unapologetically imperialist. You could watch this happening in Washington's think tanks. Over their lunchroom tables, in their seminar rooms, on the covers of their small magazines, the idea of empire got a thorough airing—particularly among ideologues close to the policymakers planning the war on terror. At a panel discussion in the middle of 2002, I first heard "Middle East reform"—as in making the Middle East

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AND: A calendar of *New Yorker*
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democratic and bourgeois—spoken of the way people speak of welfare reform. As the military historian Max Boot wrote in *The Weekly Standard*, "Afghanistan and other troubled lands today cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets."

Everyone could admit that there were disreputable aspects of the old empire. Yet what would be wrong with a truly enlightened version of foreign rule? "There's general agreement that there was a mistake that the Brits made, which is that they allowed the imperial administrators to perpetuate a kind of snobbishness over the Western-oriented gentlemen," one of these conservative thinkers told me last spring, just before the start of the war. "We think these are the lessons we have learned. And that, therefore, imperialism as practiced this time will be different."

In "Empire," which appeared last spring, the acclaimed historian Niall Ferguson presented the British Empire as a model of how to secure global stability, foreign investment for developing countries, and simple good government. "What the British Empire proved is that empire is a form of international government that can work—and not just for the benefit of the ruling power," he wrote. Through more than three hundred slick, illustrated pages, Ferguson mapped the past onto the present, identifying the building blocks of Britain's empire with their contemporary American analogues. For Britain's gunboats, America's F-16s and Tomahawk missiles—always prepared to knock around troublemakers on the empire's periphery. For Britain's missionary and social-uplift societies, today's N.G.O.s. In place of Britain's long-running policing action against the slave trade, similarly high-minded campaigns against ethnic cleansing.

Why did the British imperium come to an end? The standard histories tell us about great-power rivalries, a diminishing technological gap between overlords and subjects, growing independence movements among the colonized. Some conservative scholars have suggested, however, that the British Empire fell apart because of war-induced impoverishment and national fatigue. Finally, they say, the Brits just lacked will. But in 2002 America had will in abundance, and more money and guns than the British had ever had. Ferguson was challenging us simply to face up to what we already were. In the closing pages of his book, he wrote, "Americans have taken our old role without yet facing the fact that an empire comes with it." We were, in his view, an empire "that dare not speak its name . . . an empire in denial."

That empire did not arise overnight. It was, after all, under the cover of American military might that Germany and Japan emerged as prosperous and peaceable democracies. And, especially since the end of the Cold War, the apparatus of American power—the aircraft carriers and fighter wings and Army divisions—has come to encircle most of the planet. As Ferguson notes, a map of the British Royal Navy coaling stations that dotted the globe a century ago looks much like the array of bases the United States maintains today.

An "empire of bases" is what Chalmers Johnson calls it in his new book, "The Sorrows of Empire" (Metropolitan; $25). It is not, for him, an edifying spectacle. Much in Johnson's account is no different from what might be found in a host of other left-leaning critiques of American power, but the trajectory of his career sets him apart. For decades, Johnson, an Asia specialist, was one of those stock figures of the Cold War: the defense analyst and academic in constant orbit of the C.I.A. Then, late in his career, he began to reconsider his Cold War commitments, particularly in East Asia. The way America garrisoned allied countries like Japan and South Korea put him in mind of the de-facto empire that the Soviets had created in Eastern Europe. Once he made that turn, he never looked back.

By Johnson's count, in 2001 the United States maintained some seven hundred and twenty-five military installations abroad—an anomalous situation. Foreign troops have never been stationed in this country, and most Americans would probably find the idea of permanent garrisons of German, Mexican, or Indian troops on Ameri-

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Time, inexhaustible wound, for
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—*Franz Wright*

can soil almost beyond comprehension. And yet in many countries in Europe and East Asia a similar arrangement has been commonplace for generations. A quarter of a million American military personnel (along with a quarter of a million dependents and civilians) are stationed abroad, mostly on the old Cold War frontiers of Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Although, in the last decade, the United States has reduced its military "footprint" in Europe and the Pacific Rim, more bases have sprung up in the new arc of conflict stretching from the Balkans to the Caspian and into Central Asia. Among these are the sprawling Camp Bondsteel, in Kosovo, and the new Camp Stronghold Freedom, in Uzbekistan, each complete with all the amenities of home for the soldiers stationed there and special treaties designed to protect the troops from local law.

President Clinton came to office intending to keep foreign entanglements to a minimum. That isn't what happened, of course. Despite dire predictions that every military engagement would lead to a quagmire, America found that it could strike with virtual impunity almost anywhere on the globe, and military forays became more common. Back when the superpower rivalry circumscribed America's ability to use force directly, problems were more likely to be solved through high-stakes diplomacy or covert action. Now there is an overwhelming temptation to play to our strength. America's diplomatic corps, already menaced by domestic enemies and falling budgets, is no better than those of other great powers. Our military, on the other hand, dwarfs everyone else's. Hence the progressive militarization of America's foreign policy.

The trend was accelerated by changes in the structure of the military. The Pentagon had for decades divided the world into a series of regional commands—sometimes known as CINCdoms, after the acronym for commander-in-chief, the title held, until recently, by those who command them. (The last of these—CENTCOM, which covers the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the Horn of Africa—was created in 1983.) But a reorganization of the Pentagon in 1986 vastly increased the power of the CINCs by having them report directly to the President as well as to the Secretary of Defense, unlike the chiefs of the military's four services, who report to civilian secretaries. By the late nineties, the officers who led these commands—men like General Wesley Clark, at the European Command; Marine General Anthony Zinni, at CENTCOM; and Admiral Dennis Blair, at Pacific Command—were far more powerful than the various ambassadors who conduct the nation's diplomatic business in the countries

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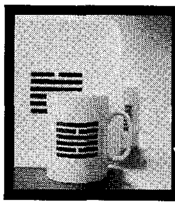

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under each CINC's oversight. Johnson notes that when, in October, 1999, General Pervez Musharraf seized power in a bloodless coup in Pakistan, President Clinton called in protest and asked that his call be returned. Musharraf called Zinni instead. "Tony," Musharraf reportedly said, "I want to tell you what I am doing." So the trend hasn't been simply a militarization of foreign policy. It has also been a diplomatization of the American military. In the architecture of empire, the CINCs functioned like proconsuls or regional managers of Pax Americana, with plenty of money and guns and no little ingenuity.

By the end of the decade, the United States had established two protectorates under the aegis of NATO and the U.N., intervened or helped intervene in five countries or provinces (Bosnia, East Timor, Haiti, Kosovo, and Somalia), and practiced some form of gunboat diplomacy against Afghanistan, China, North Korea, Sudan, and, almost constantly, Iraq. These wars were neither defensive nor offensive. They were policing actions, small wars of management—of, in a sense, imperial management, like the "little wars" that were a backdrop to life in Victorian England. Similarly, the United States Treasury worked through the I.M.F. and the World Bank to head off a Mexican financial collapse in 1995, and did much the same thing in 1997 to contain the so-called "Asian flu." Step by step, America took on the job, often with others but sometimes alone, of enforcing order in almost every corner of the globe.

If America, militarily unchallenged and economically dominant, indeed took on the functions of imperial governance, its empire was, for the most part, loose and consensual. In the past couple of years, however, neo-imperialism, this thing of stealth, politesse, and obliquity, has come to seem, so to speak, too neo. Especially as the war on terror began, hard-liners who were frustrated by Clinton's bumbling and hesitations saw no reason to deny that America was an imperial power, and a great one: how else to describe a country that had so easily vanquished Afghanistan, once legendary as the graveyard of empires? The only question was whether America would start running its empire with foresight and determination, rather than leaving it to chance, drift, and disaster.

The Bush doctrine, with its tenets of preëmptive war, regime change, and permanent American military primacy, promised a new global order. The best way to think of that order is by analogy with the internal organization of a nation-state. What makes a state a state is its monopoly over the legitimate use of force, which means that citizens don't have to worry about arming to defend themselves against each other. Instead, they can focus on productive pursuits like raising families, making money, and enjoying their leisure time. In the world of the Bush doctrine, states take the place of citizens. As the President told graduating cadets at West Point in 2002, America intends to keep its "military strengths beyond challenge, thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace." In other words, if America has an effective monopoly on the exercise of military force, other countries should be able to set aside the distractions of arming and plotting against each other and put their energies into producing consumer electronics, textiles, tea. What the Bush doctrine calls for—paradoxically, given its proponents—is a form of world government.

The new order envisaged by the Bush doctrine hasn't quite worked out as it was meant to. That's because, from the beginning, the White House has acted on the assumption that bold action would make our allies rally behind us and our enemies cower. Building a consensus with our friends before we acted only encouraged quarrelsomeness. The point wasn't that dictation was superior to consensus; the point was that it *created* consensus.

Again and again, things didn't turn out that way. In March, 2002, Dick Cheney, in his only trip abroad as Vice-President before last week, toured Middle Eastern capitals to line up support for the war against Iraq. Foreign leaders used the occasion to denounce the planned attack. A week after Cheney's return, the Saudis and the Kuwaitis were arranging their first rapprochement with Iraq since the Gulf War. In the months preceding the second Gulf War, a year later, the Administration was castigated for bungled diplomacy with its allies. But the real problem was that, though America could do as it liked, its erstwhile allies didn't necessarily fall in line.

"Bill Clinton was actually a much more effective imperialist than George W. Bush," Chalmers Johnson writes darkly. "During the Clinton administration, the United States employed an indirect approach in imposing its will on other nations." That "indirect approach" might more properly be termed a policy of leading by consensus rather than by dictation. But Johnson is right about its superior efficacy. American power is magnified when it is embedded in international institutions, as leftists have lamented. It is also somewhat constrained, as conservatives have lamented. This is precisely the covenant on which American supremacy has been based. The trouble is that hard-line critics of multilateralism focussed on how that power was constrained and missed how it was magnified.

Conservative ideologues, in calling for an international order in which America would have a statelike monopoly on coercive force, somehow forgot what makes for a successful state. Stable governments rule not by direct coercion but by establishing a shared sense of allegiance. In an old formula, "domination" gives way to "hegemony"—brute force gives way to the deeper power of consent. This is why the classic definition of the state speaks of *legitimate* force. In a constitutional order, government accepts certain checks on its authority, but the result is to deepen that authority, rather than to diminish it. Legitimacy is the ultimate "force multiplier," in military argot. And if your aim is to maintain a global order, as opposed to rousting this or that pariah regime, you need all the force multipliers you can get.

The empire-makers of 2002 weakened America's covert empire because, at a critical level, they didn't understand how it worked. As Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay note in "America Unbound" (Brookings; $22.95), a new history of Bush's foreign policy, Administration hawks believe that American global supremacy is possible not only because America is a uniquely just nation but because others around the globe see it as such. The current unipolar state of the world is the best evidence of this: because most countries see American power as being more benign than not, they acquiesce in it. But this acquiescence isn't irreversible.

In ways that many hawks have been slow to realize, the demise of the Soviet Union has had a paradoxical effect on America's role in the world. What has made the United States more powerful militarily has made it weaker politically. For half a century, American policymakers had been accustomed to habits of deference from democratic allies in Europe and Asia. Yet fear of the Soviets was responsible for much of that deference. That's why, in the decade after the Cold War, the makers of our foreign policy recognized that America could best protect its supremacy by making sure that smaller countries felt, even in some small measure, that they had been "dealt in." This was one function of those balky international organizations, and not the least important objective of international diplomacy.

The current Administration has, of course, taken a different tack. As Fareed Zakaria observed last year, after speaking to government officials in dozens of countries around the world, almost every country that has had dealings with the Bush Administration has felt humiliated by it. America isn't powerful because people like us: our power is a product of dollars and guns. But when people think that America's unique role in the world is basically legitimate, that power becomes less costly to exert and to sustain. People around the world have respected and admired American power because of the way America has acted. If it acts differently, the perceptions of American benevolence can start to ebb—and, to judge from any public-opinion poll from abroad over the last year, that's essentially what has happened. When it comes to political capital, too, this is an Administration with a weakness for deficit spending.

There are signs that the Administration may be capable of adjusting its course. Last month, James A. Baker III was dispatched as an envoy to Europe, ostensibly to negotiate debt restructuring but with an unstated brief of fence-mending. On the Korean peninsula, where our initial "no deals" posturing proved futile, the United States has been working with Russia, China, Japan, and

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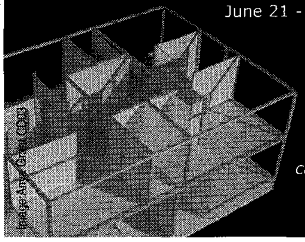

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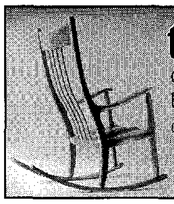

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South Korea, and offering North Korea a "multilateral security pledge." President Bush now speaks about the virtues of "a collective voice trying to convince a leader to change behavior."

Not all conservatives have been chastened by the setbacks of unilateralism; some have been stoked to greater outrage and resolve. This much is clear from "An End to Evil" (Random House; $25.95), by David Frum, a former Bush speechwriter, who helped coin the phrase "axis of evil," and Richard Perle, a former chairman of the Defense Policy Board. Rising disapproval from abroad doesn't lead Frum and Perle to question their policies. It just confirms them in the belief that America has even more enemies than it realized.

"An End to Evil" is a call to stay the course in an unremitting battle, and to resist the slide toward appeasement and defeatism. "We have to cast off once and for all the 1970s cynicism that sneered from the back of the classroom at the joiner and volunteer," the authors write in a typical passage. Their fury is directed almost as much against America's internal enemies as its external ones. And the fury directed abroad is boundless. The book conveys a general sense that America is at war with Islam itself, anywhere and everywhere: the contemporary Muslim world, with the exception of a few irenic clerics and a few secular intellectuals, is depicted as one great cauldron of hate, murder, obscurantism, and deceit. If our Muslim adversaries are not to destroy Western civilization, we must gird for more battles.

The authors advise toppling more regimes in the Middle East, treating the French and the Saudis as the enemies they are, squeezing China, and launching an air and naval blockade against North Korea. At home, they propose aggressive reform in the State Department, the C.I.A., and the armed forces. "Friends and Foes," the penultimate chapter, turns out to discuss only foes. In sum, the prescription amounts to war, cold or hot, against pretty much everyone, everywhere, all the time—until everyone relents. And, if that doesn't do the trick, more war.

The significance of "An End to Evil" is as much in its tone as in its policies. An illuminating contrast can be made with a book published a year ago, William Kristol and Lawrence Kaplan's "The War Over Iraq," a curiously sunny brief for regime change in Iraq as the cornerstone of a new Pax Americana. The Victorian cant of empire always had a tone of mastery, rather than bellicosity, and the talk of 2002 had just that air of masterful confidence. Great powers, after all, are normally custodians of peace and stability. Why shouldn't they be? They're already on top. Historically, it has been "revisionist" powers that have had an interest in upending settled arrangements and sowing unrest. Like Wilhelmine Germany at the start of the last century, they stir up trouble and look for ways to overturn a world system that has held them down. For Perle and Frum, America is the revisionist power in the midst of its own imperium.

In this latest turn of neoconservative thought, the trappings of optimism and the hopeful talk of a liberal-democratic domino effect have been abandoned. Where Ferguson is all cool confidence, Perle and Frum are fire and foreboding. Theirs are not policies that would lead to the end of evil; they might well, in the long run, lead to the end of empire.

Hard-liners like Perle and Frum would do well to remember that America began as an empire, formally and officially. It wasn't our empire, of course; it was Britain's. And the story of how Britain lost its first empire may be more instructive for Americans today than how Britain found itself without its second. Americans like to flatter themselves that the seeds of independence were planted with the first spades into the earth of Massachusetts and Virginia. In fact, during the century before the Revolution, Britain's North American colonies were, by most measures, becoming more Anglicized, more firmly tied to Britain's monarchy and trade. (The archetype of American homespun virtues, Ben Franklin, spent much of his life trying to make a name in London and find a place for himself in the British establishment.) Britain lost its North American empire through a common mistake: it misunderstood the nature of its power. In particular, it confused the power it had on paper—its claims to sovereignty and dominion—with the nature of the control it exercised on the coast of North America.

Britain's hold in North America was, at heart, a consensual arrangement. Over more than a century, the home government had reduced most of the settlements to Crown colonies with royally appointed governors. But London did not exercise what historians call government in depth. It had little sway in the family and business networks that held the colonies together. In fact, outside a few port towns, the Crown had to rely on local bigwigs—the New England merchants and Virginia planters—to wield authority in its name.

For years, the status quo persisted. The menace posed by Britain's imperial rival, France, helped keep the colonies in line. But by the early seventeen-sixties Britain had successfully prosecuted a world war with France, a conflict that began when a twenty-two-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Virginia militia named George Washington attacked French troops not far from the site of modern-day Pittsburgh. The conflict quickly spread from North America to the German states, India, and the Caribbean. The Seven Years' War—which the colonists called the French and Indian War—left Britain the master of North America and the dominant imperial power around the globe, with the most formidable navy the world had ever seen. Still, the war had been costly, and London suddenly looked on America with an eye to just how much wealth it could extract from it.

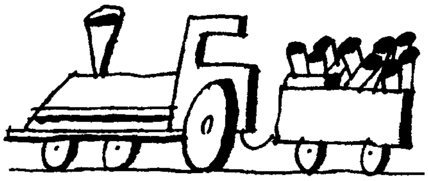
The result was a dozen years of contention over taxes, which exploded into arguments over principle, and the loss of Britain's most valuable imperial possessions. Britain believed that the reins of monarchical allegiance would keep its colonies secure; but when it pulled back on those reins, they fell apart. The truth is that, once Britain got to the point of holding on to its colonists by force, it had already all but lost them. Vengeful France, using its runner-up navy to such effect at Yorktown, merely provided the coup de grâce. Britain thought it was at its strongest. Yet by knocking out the rival that drove the colonies into its arms, and then changing the rules, Britain had actually become weaker.

Historical analogies are never perfect. America's power is far too great to be easily or quickly dislodged. But there are lessons to be learned here, and not just about the French gift for making trouble for great nations at the apex of their power. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Amateur Marriage, *by Anne Tyler (Knopf; $24.95).* This novel of marital unhappiness focusses on a couple whose fraught relationship spans sixty years. In the early days of the Second World War, Michael and Pauline find themselves drawn together despite misgivings and bitter fights. The resulting marriage is a thirty-year clash between her impulsiveness and self-absorption and his taciturnity and barely suppressed rage. Tyler examines their acrimonious bond, which persists even after their eventual divorce, with a keen eye for the minor differences that suddenly widen into chasms. In order to illuminate every facet of the couple's interactions and personalities, the story is told from several points of view: those of Michael and Pauline and two of their three children. Although Tyler's prose occasionally slips into banality, she never falters in creating vivid characters whose weaknesses are both credible and compelling.

A Saint, More or Less, *by Henry Grunwald (Random House; $23.95).* Grunwald prefaces his historical novel with an account of how he picked up a little book about miracles from a remainder table and came across a mention of Nicole Tavernier. A healer, vagrant, and self-proclaimed prophet in France at the end of the sixteenth century, Tavernier was championed, for a time, by the legendary Barbe Acarie, who founded the French branch of the Discalced Carmelites and was later beatified. Very little is known about Tavernier's life, and this gives full rein to Grunwald's inventive gifts. Ultimately, the novel is as much about doubt, fraud, cattiness, and superstition as it is about faith. Grunwald, himself thoroughly secular, seems surprised at his own fascination with Tavernier, and recommends her as a "patron saint of all those who want to believe but cannot."



A Nation Under Our Feet, *by Steven Hahn (Harvard; $35).* Looking back on his antebellum childhood, Booker T. Washington wondered at how slaves "on the remotest plantations" had so knowledgeably debated "the great National questions." Hahn argues, in this ambitious and fascinating book, that associations of slaves—centered on kinship, work, and religion—were far more intricate, enduring, and politicized than has been realized. For Hahn, plantation life was the crucible in which modern black political communities were formed. Slaves who hid under porches to overhear news later astonished their former masters by marching in groups to the polls (with women acting as "enforcers" of party loyalty). One of the most striking theses here is that black rural laborers, rather than urban, educated freeborn leaders, radicalized Reconstruction. Freed slaves were also, Hahn writes, some of the most important advocates America ever had for a broad concept of citizenship based not on property or education but on "manhood"—for which he calls them "the jacobins of the country."

The Naked Crowd, *by Jeffrey Rosen (Random House; $24.95).* In an effort to predict where concerns about domestic security may lead us, Rosen takes the example of Britain. After two deadly I.R.A. bombings in London's financial district, the government mounted surveillance cameras on eight gates in the area. By now, the country has some four million cameras, and the average citizen is photographed by an estimated three hundred of them every day. But the cameras have yet to help capture a single terrorist. Rosen's wide-ranging and thoughtful defense of privacy rights suggests that the United States is highly susceptible to similar measures, citing an executive branch intent on stoking the public's post-9/11 anxieties and, more surprisingly, the voluntary surrender of privacy inherent in personal Web pages and reality TV shows. Despite Rosen's occasionally hectoring tone, his solution—that new security technologies be tamed with strong congressional restraints—is far too sensible to stand much chance of being implemented.

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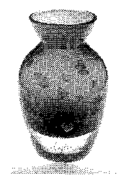

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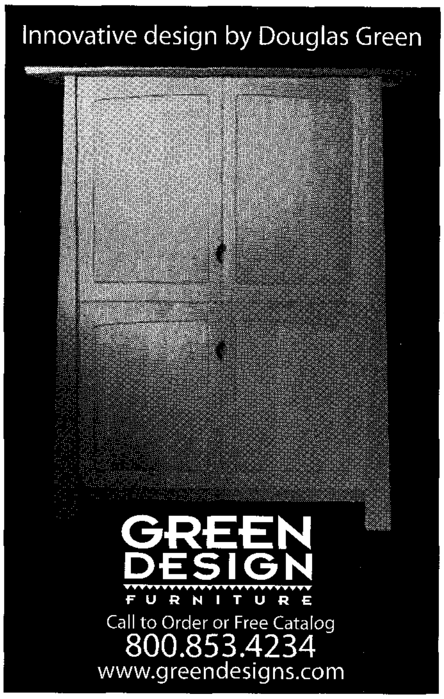

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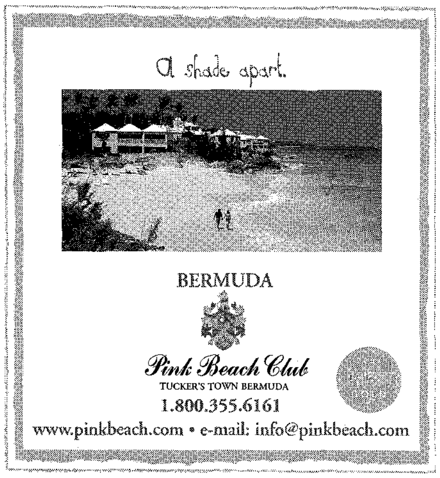

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THE THEATRE

INNOCENCE ABROAD

Adam Guettel's Italian romance.

BY JOHN LAHR

Once upon a time in the early sixties, the composer Mary Rodgers suggested to her gloomy father, the composer Richard Rodgers, that he adapt for Broadway Elizabeth Spencer's novella “The Light in the Piazza” (which occupied almost an entire issue of this magazine in 1960); the great man demurred. Four decades later, however, Mary Rodgers's son, the gifted composer and lyricist Adam Guettel, took up the challenge. Among the many delightful surprises in the resulting show, which opened last week at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, is its overture. Has any other American musical in the past twenty years had enough memorable melody to warrant such a thing? Guettel's tunes are richly textured and warmly atmospheric; like the Tuscan light of Spencer's story, they create “the sense that everything is clear and visible, that nothing is withheld.”

Using violin, piano, and harp, Guettel's overture evokes the sun-dappled summer of Florence in the mid-fifties, where Margaret Johnson (Victoria Clark), a Southern lady of means and manners, has brought her jejune twenty-six-year-old daughter, Clara (Celia Keenan-Bolger), to see the sights. The production's central metaphor is a red-ribboned straw hat—in its design, somewhere between schoolgirl and Schiaparelli. At the beginning of Bartlett Sher's poised production, the hat drops from above into Margaret's hands before ending up on Clara's pert blond head. Soon it is blown back up and into the eager clutches of a twenty-year-old Italian charmer named Fabrizio (Wayne Wilcox). Clara's and Fabrizio's eyes meet, and—well, you know the rest. Or you think you do. The hat is an emblem of something lost and found, a symbol of hope that foreshadows the tempestuous trajectory of the story to come.

In a full skirt and white gloves, Clara seems a picture postcard of fifties normality, punch-pressed from a book marked “Ingénue.” Her looks and her attitude—buoyant, dutiful, sweet, naïve—conform to the bright banality of the time, giving her an air of coherence, and this is part of the play's drama and Clara's tragedy. Because, by degrees, and with little euphemistic clues from Margaret—“She isn't regular,” she's “not quite as she seems”—Clara's strangeness emerges, like a shadow growing longer at the end of the day. There's the girlish, round-shouldered way she runs with her head down, the sudden emotional squalls, her charming forthrightness. “Look, a scar!” she says to Fabrizio, lifting her ponytail to show him something behind her ear. Her profound scars are, of course, invisible and not as easy to define. Her “dreary secret,” as the story calls it, is revealed only late in the show; as a young girl, Clara was kicked in the head by a Shetland pony. She has a mental age of twelve.

But in this whirlwind romance—where neither lover comprehends the other's language or culture—otherness is the climate of connection. “I don't understand a word they're saying,” Clara sings in “The Beauty Is.” “I'm as different here as different can be / And the beauty is I still meet people like me.” In fact, on an unconscious level, Fabrizio's acceptance of Clara's oddness is what draws her to him. He sees her in no context other than her own. This sentiment is conveyed brilliantly in “Love to Me,” in which he reimagines the moment when he first caught sight of Clara. “Ohhhhh, you're not alone,” he sings. “This is how I know / This is what I see / This is love to me.” Fabrizio's fractured English doesn't prevent him from making himself known to Clara. “Now is I am happiness with you,” he sings in “Passeggiata.” In both deficiency and desire, Clara and Fabrizio are equals, and that is what makes intimacy between them possible. In a gorgeous duet, “Say It Somehow,” Guettel

TOM BACHTELL

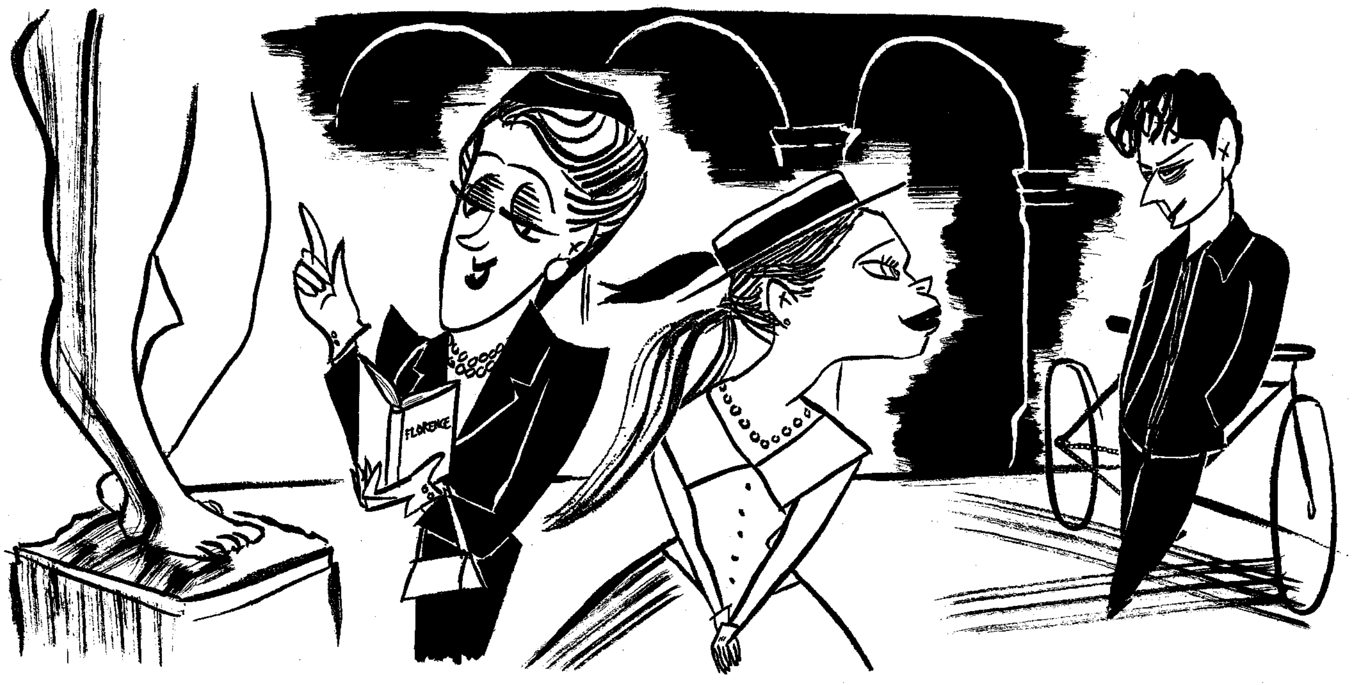
has his handicapped lovers sing, "Say it somehow anyway you can / You know me . . . / I know the sound of touch me. / I think I heard the sound of wrap your arms around me." Their inadequacies force them beyond reason and competence to pure feeling.

Instead of the anodyne commercial musical formula, which promises distraction, "The Light in the Piazza" offers a complex contemplation of the well-defended emptiness in every man and woman. "Something is very wrong," Clara tells Fabrizio toward the end of the show, as she attempts to break off their relationship. "I would fix it if I could, knew how. I can't." She goes on, "Everyone has been disappointed in me. . . . I'm the one that's not good enough. You just don't see it now." Confronted with Clara's quandary, we are audibly silent—not manipulated into frenzied Broadway-style forgetfulness but roused to reflect on our own unexplainable wounds. What are the mysterious things that hold *us* back from embracing life or allowing it to embrace us? Can our own forms of suffering be redeemed? To this last question, Guettel's answer is an absolute maybe.

"Things are often hard," Margaret drawls at one point. Her understatement, borrowed from Spencer's story, is indicative of the good face she puts on her doomed life. In light of the truth about Clara, Margaret's comic attempts to keep her woman-child safe from predatory Italians assume an altogether different dimension. Her cosseting turns out to be a kind of courage. When Margaret finally realizes that love, family, even happiness may be possible for Clara, her longing and her long-suffering are unleashed in a powerful reprise of "The Beauty Is." "So much wanting something," she sings. "So much reaching for it / So much wishing just to have one moment back / So much being patient / So much blind acceptance." Superbly played by Clark, Margaret is a potent amalgam of charm, civility, and cunning. "Women like Margaret Johnson do not surrender; they simply take up another line of campaign," Spencer writes. Clark gets Margaret's backbone and blind spots just right. Her desire to treat her daughter as if she were normal prevents her from ever coming clean with Fabrizio's family about the nature of Clara's affliction; and it compels her to gamble on a marriage for her daughter that she knows will be intolerable to her buttoned-down businessman husband, in whose eyes, she sings, she "can see the winter." As Margaret recognizes the magic of love that transforms her daughter, she also recognizes the atrophy of feeling in her own marriage. Craig Lucas, who wrote the book for the show, is responsible for this narrative undercurrent, which also lends a whiff of flirtatiousness to Margaret's relationship with Clara's suave prospective father-in-law (the first-rate Mark Harelik). It's a substantial improvement on Spencer's otherwise excellent story line, which includes two hand-wringing reversals on the way to the altar. In "Fable," a heartrendingly beautiful song that ends the show and works as both epiphany and envoi, Margaret turns to the audience as her nervous daughter sets off down the aisle and sings of love as a leap of faith:

> If you find in the world
> In the wide wide world
> That someone sees you
> That someone knows you
> Love! . . .
> Love, if you can, oh my Clara,
> Love, if you can and be loved
> May it last forever . . .
> The light in the piazza

Guettel's music and lyrics take nothing from the razzle-dazzle bargain basement of feeling; they represent, instead, a genuine expense of spirit. Rather than selling a cheap-and-cheerful redemption, the show offers only the prospect of repair. "The Light in the Piazza" doesn't want to make theatregoers feel good; it wants to make them feel deeply. This it does, and that is why, despite the show's quality, I suspect that the swamis of the rialto will pass on bringing it to Broadway. Still, Guettel's kind of talent cannot be denied. He shouldn't change for Broadway; Broadway, if it is to survive as a creative theatrical force, should change for him. ♦



"The Light in the Piazza," at the Goodman, doesn't want to make theatregoers feel good; it wants to make them feel deeply.

MUSICAL EVENTS

MURDER WILL OUT

Colin Davis revisits the mystery of "Peter Grimes."

BY ALEX ROSS

Maybe there is a saving grace in the fact that New York gets to hear "Peter Grimes" so seldom—every five years, on average. Benjamin Britten's beautiful and terrifying masterpiece, the tale of an antisocial East Anglian fisherman whose apprentices have a habit of dying on the job, has not yet lost its capacity to surprise; it clobbers us anew with each revival. "Grimes" ranks high among operas of the past century, not only because the music is so fiendishly good but because the music and the words together propel a debate that never stops raging. You are drawn into the melee from the moment the curtain rises, and leave feeling exhilarated, even though the journey is as dark as theatre gets.

Why the opera has never caught on at the Met is a puzzle. The house last presented it in 1998, and no revival seems imminent. Last week, "Grimes" fans gratefully turned to the London Symphony Orchestra, which presented a concert performance at Avery Fisher Hall. Under the direction of Colin Davis, the L.S.O. has made a habit of descending on New York in the middle of winter and electroshocking the city out of its seasonal affective disorder with galvanic programs of works both familiar and unexpected. The orchestra is a venerable one, celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year, but it plays with the kind of isn't-music-amazing enthusiasm that you usually hear only in student ensembles. Where the extra edge comes from is anyone's guess. Reading Richard Morrison's new history of the L.S.O., I got the sense that the orchestra's diverse activities in music education, film-score recording, and crossover projects have made its "classical" playing less routine. In any case, it seems fitting that this ever youthful group should mark its centenary not by putting on a pompous gala but by unleashing "Grimes," the Hound of the Baskervilles of the operatic repertory.

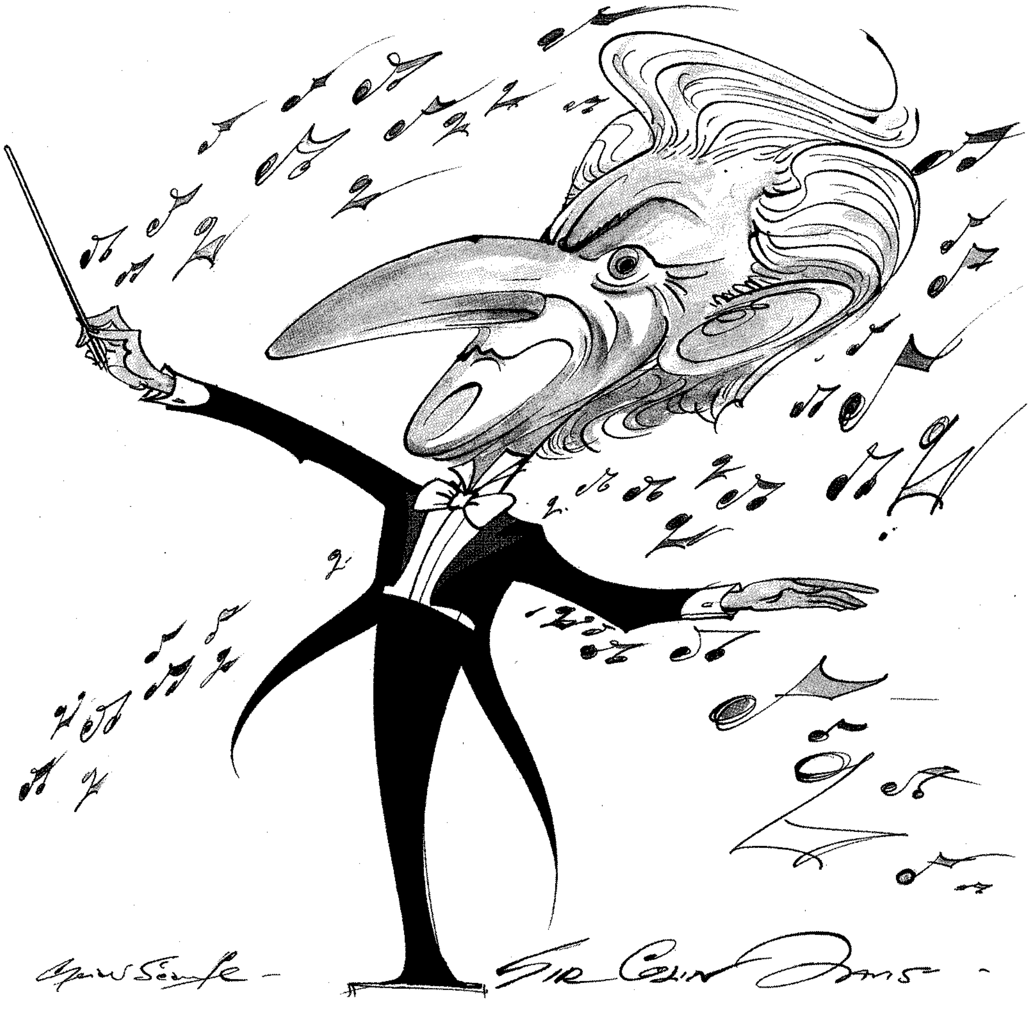
There are essentially two schools of thought on "Grimes." One is the outcast-persecuted-by-society, or Popular Front, reading, to which the composer and the librettist both subscribed. According to this view, Grimes is a difficult, unlikable man—a rageaholic, let's say—but he is not to blame for the deaths of his two apprentices, the first of whom drowns before the opera begins and the second of whom falls off a cliff in Act II. The fisherman is the victim of a lynch mob; the villagers expiate their own sins by making him their scapegoat. Mrs. Sedley, the opium-addicted busybody who accuses Grimes of murder, is a diseased Miss Marple who has been searching all her life for a crime equal to her hallucinations. The attack on Grimes can be seen as an allegory of the persecution of homosexuals and pacifists (Britten was both) or of Communists (Montagu Slater, the librettist, was one). Indeed, the villagers often chatter viciously among themselves like an Un-Anglian Activities Committee: "Him who despises us / we'll destroy!"

Then, there is George Crabbe's poem "Peter Grimes," which inspired the opera. Crabbe was born in 1754 in the fishing village of Aldeburgh, where the story is set and where Britten wrote most of the score. The poet heard tell of a cruel fisherman who was thought to have caused the deaths of several boys, and from that rumor he wove the character of Grimes. He created a horrible but compelling brute whose soliloquies sometimes rise to Shakespearean grandeur. The abuse of the boys is not only physical but possibly also sexual: "Strange that a frame so weak could bear so long / The grossest insult and the foulest wrong." The villagers' only crime is that they fail to notice what is going on. Britten had originally intended to make a faithful adaptation of this ghastly material; his early sketches, which can be seen in the Britten archive in Aldeburgh, repeatedly refer to the deaths of the boys as "murders." It was Slater who pulled the opera in the direction of social allegory. Britten himself softened the character at the last minute, perhaps fearing a scandal.

Enter Colin Davis. In the seventies, when he was the music director of Covent Garden, he conducted sensational performances of "Grimes" in which all the violence of Crabbe rose to the surface. His ally was the tenor Jon Vickers, who sang the title role with an emotional nakedness that trained singers seldom achieve onstage. On the classic recording that Davis and Vickers made, you can hear Grimes's universal anger in the first minute of the inquest scene that begins the opera, just in the way he sings "I swear by Almighty God." Vickers also made Grimes a high-dramatic role rather than the lyric creation of Peter Pears, who first played the part. Britten disliked Vickers's interpretation, but the intentional fallacy applies as much to music as to literature: the composer had no right to censor rival readings of his own work, nor did he try.

Was the Davis-Vickers "Grimes" really so opposed to Britten's original vision? The music points many times to the sadist in Grimes, often enough to make you question whether he is a remotely defensible character. The passacaglia interlude in Act II depicts, according to the composer's own testimony, the suffering of John, Grimes's second apprentice; individual phrases describe the boy's tears, his fears, his pain. The great climaxes of the opera embody the village's hatred of Grimes; but here the orchestra hints at the boy's hatred, which is another matter altogether. Another buried clue: at the very end of the act, after John dies, the solo viola, which in Britten's music typically represents the voice of innocence, plays a figure in consecutive rising minor thirds. It is a slowed-down, stretched-out version of a line that the preacher Boles sang in the previous act: "His exercise is not with men but killing boys!" It sounds very much like the accusation of a ghost. Notably, Crabbe's poem is full of Banquo-like spirits who torment Grimes unto madness and death.

Davis's command of "Grimes" has grown ever more certain with the passing years. The L.S.O.'s playing in the "Storm" Interlude was so unrelentingly ferocious that I almost wanted to laugh out loud: these impeccable musicians were thrashing around like a punk band on crystal meth. There was little effort at naturalistic sea textures; the interlude portrays, after all, both the external storm hitting the Borough and the storm within Grimes's mind. But it wasn't all sound and fury. The softly arching violin phrases that evoke the eye of the storm (and also "Grimes's ecstasy," according to Britten) hovered in the distance like a mirage. And I was struck by how seamlessly the interludes meshed with the whole. In the opera house, with stage noises coming from behind the curtain, the interludes sometimes have a fitful, awkward effect. This time, we seemed to be hearing the music as the composer first heard it in his mind, in the Old Mill outside Aldeburgh village, at the height of the Second World War.



GERALD SCARFE

Alas, Jon Vickers retired years ago, and Davis has not found a satisfying or even satisfactory replacement. I would not want to judge Glenn Winslade on the basis of this one outing; the tenor began to lose his voice at the end of Act II and was plainly not himself in the crucial Mad Scene. In a broadcast of "Grimes," which I caught on the BBC's Radio 3 Web site, he had no such troubles and demonstrated a sturdy, noble voice. But, even disregarding his vocal struggles, Winslade seemed the wrong man for the part. He displayed neither the poetry of the dreamer nor the cruelty of the sadist. Anthony Michaels-Moore was a rock-solid Balstrode; Jill Grove was a big-voiced, big-hearted Auntie; Janice Watson was a strongly lyrical, if perhaps too composed, Ellen Orford. The London Symphony Chorus, like the orchestra, achieved maximum expressive intensity without ever losing control.

It is a tribute to Davis's authority that the difficulties of the lead tenor hardly registered. I had the impression that in this performance the conductor was reconciling the two schools of Grimesian thought. He pointedly showed no sympathy for the villagers, limiting their opportunities for local color. Even the merry-making scenes were driven along at a neurotic tempo. Yet a monumental rendition of the "boy's suffering" interlude, together with Paul Silverthorne's impassioned viola solo, implied that Grimes was guilty of something frightful, if not Mrs. Sedley's "murder most foul." It's not unlike the morally tortuous situation in Orson Welles's "Touch of Evil," in which a corrupt detective plants incriminating evidence on the man who actually committed the murder in question. No one is pure; all share in the guilt. In the end, as Grimes's boat sinks off the coast, there is one last overwhelming wave of sound: the ocean rolls in to wash away every trace of the indecipherable tragedy.

As it happens, Richard Morrison's history notes that in 1912 the L.S.O. came close to sharing Grimes's watery fate. An American impresario booked all hundred musicians on the Titanic, but at the last minute he moved them to a different ship. It would have been a terrible loss, and also one hell of a performance of "Nearer, My God, to Thee." ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

THREE'S A CROWD

"On the Run," "An Amazing Couple," and "After Life."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The Belgian director Lucas Belvaux has made three new films, which will open, during the coming month, at a rate of one per week. The first is called "On the Run," the second, "An Amazing Couple," and the third, "After Life." Belvaux would prefer each film to stand alone, but these works were raised together, like triplets, and they should be confronted en masse. If you had told Shakespeare that the first and third parts of "Henry VI" totally rocked but that you couldn't be bothered with the second, he would have fingered the fluff below his bottom lip and called you a very whoreson dog. And quite right, too.

The movies were shot, over a period of twenty-two weeks, in Grenoble, and anybody who knows the place will appreciate what a useful arena it makes. The city sits—nicely cupped or loftily frowned upon, according to taste—in a range of mountains, and the air there feels not just clean but bright, like the backdrop for a toothpaste commercial. From the start, Belvaux makes it plain that he has sniffed something sinister beneath the shine. Here's the deal: these three films do not tell successive stories. In fact, they offer pretty much the same bundle of story, untangled in different ways. Sometimes a scene will be repeated from film to film, with minor adjustments; at other times, it will merely be implied, but we will, for the first time, learn of its aftermath. Each movie covers a similar time frame, within which the characters loom and recede.

In "On the Run," a terrorist named Bruno (played by Belvaux himself) is sprung from jail after fifteen years. He goes into hiding, makes contact with a former colleague, and resumes his bombing campaign against capitalist institutions. It is a lonely business, for the world has moved on, and nobody else is kindling that old political fire. Bruno meets a drug addict called Agnès (Dominique Blanc), saves her life, and is rewarded with a stay in a chalet, perched high above the town, which she borrows—pretending that she has a lover's assignation—from her friend Cécile (Ornella Muti). But everything closes in on Bruno, and he flees toward the border, up into the snows.

In "An Amazing Couple," Cécile moves to center stage. Her marriage to Alain (François Morel) is under strain. He is a hypochondriac, who muses upon his own demise into a tape recorder; she, in turn, suffers from a Proustian dose of jealousy, despite the fact that, as she is told, "no one leaves a woman like you." (Muti is one of those actresses upon whom Time has sportingly agreed to wreak no change; she is even lovelier than when she played Odette in "Swann in Love," in 1983.) Quite wrongly, Cécile believes Alain to be unfaithful and asks a cop—Pascal (Gilbert Melki), who is married to Agnès, the junkie from the opening picture—to tail him. The cop, unsurprisingly, grows fond of Cécile, whose own activities give Alain cause for paranoid doubt; soon, husband and wife are spying on each other in a sort of private Cold War. A happy ending, as in Molière, is grabbed from nowhere.

Gilbert Melki and François Morel in the second film in Lucas Belvaux's trilogy.

"After Life" turns to Pascal, the policeman, and thus to Agnès. By day, she is a teacher, but for twenty years she has been addicted to morphine, which her husband supplies under a shady agreement with a local drug baron. There is a matter-of-fact tenderness in Pascal's bizarre provision; he hands her the drug when he comes home, as if it were the evening paper, and tips her used syringes into the trash like cigarette butts. But the morphine runs dry when the drug baron asks Pascal to arrange for the death of Bruno—our terrorist, still at large in Grenoble, and in possession of incriminating facts. This Pascal will not do; he is bent because of his wife, but he will not break. In effect (the dilemma is classically French), he will not kill for love.

This is certainly the season for movie multiples. Quentin Tarantino is about to honor us with the second installment of "Kill Bill," the film that had so much to say about kung fu that it burst its banks. And Belvaux's trilogy may itself function as a digestif after the three-course blowout of "The Lord of the Rings." In addition, there are always sagas and sequels in the offing, driven by pure demand—a third Harry Potter, plus, at some point, the two hundredth James Bond. If Belvaux's trilogy plays to respectable houses here, he

LARA TOMLIN

could even get summoned to Hollywood to shoot "Scary Movie 5." His own threesome of films goes beyond any previous conceit; if Ingmar Bergman's "Through a Glass Darkly," "Winter Light," and "The Silence" became known as a trilogy, it was because those studies of fretful solitude began to pattern themselves as variations on a theme. Belvaux, however, planned his campaign from the start.

Advance word on the result was that it served as an exercise in style: the first film was a thriller, the second a comedy, and the third a melodrama. If so, Belvaux would be taking his place in an elegant tradition; 1947 saw the publication of Raymond Queneau's "Exercises in Style," in which a minor incident on a bus was recounted in ninety-nine different ways—in slang, in a sonnet, in reported speech, and so on. The book, famous in its day, now reads less as a writer's guide than as a prose poem, each passage polished like the facet of a gem. And so it is with these movies. There is no denying the jump in mood between the three; just listen to the taut, plucked strings that underscore the action in "On the Run," as opposed to the parping horns that inform us, with no great subtlety, that the predicament of Alain, in "An Amazing Couple," is to be treated primarily as farce. The first, too, is cut at quite a clip, with Bruno clinging like a bat to the safety of the night, whereas Alain's tale seems a more leisurely and sunlit affair, during which he mugs at the camera and falls asleep in a cornfield. To the weathered moviegoer, does the first not glance with gratitude at Jean-Pierre Melville, and the second tip its hat to Jacques Tati?

Not so fast. There is a scene in "An Amazing Couple" where Alain is late for his own birthday party because he is, like the majority of his gender, completely hopeless. For his wife, however, he concocts a panicky excuse about having crashed the car; she, suspicious of his movements, asks to see the damage, whereupon he races outside and beats up his vehicle—a fine old Jaguar in racing green—to make his story ring true. Only by a whisker does the sequence register as funny. If anything, in common with the best screwball, it writhes with desperation, every bit as fraught as the flight of Bruno in the earlier film.

Only with the trilogy behind you do you start to appreciate the prism that Belvaux has created. The simplest scene, when observed from another angle, acquires a different hue. In the first movie, Agnès and Cécile drive to the chalet and find Bruno. We see them through his cautious eyes; as their car pulls up, he takes out a gun, then tucks it away just in time to greet them. Compare the next film, in which, from the perspective of Cécile, the identical setup is drained of threat, so Bruno comes across as little more than a layabout, or Agnès's easy lay. (Of course, he is neither.) Agnès herself starts the trilogy as a bedraggled annoyance on the street, clawing at Bruno and sweating with her need for a fix. You cannot watch the same encounter in the third film and not pray that this poor benighted woman will find a Samaritan of some description. When she asks Bruno his name, he lies and says, "Pierre." "Saint-Pierre," she replies.

To some audiences, especially those who think that "Rashomon" pulled off a swifter version of the same trick, these nudges of emphasis will seem itchy and unconvincing, not unlike the absurd carrotty wig and hamster-colored beard with which Bruno, a master of disguise, attempts to mask his appearance. The performances, too, are a deliberate clash; Belvaux plays Bruno with such grumpy flatness that you scarcely believe him capable of murderous acts, while Dominique Blanc kicks off her portrayal of Agnès at maximum intensity and takes it from there. Yet these discrepancies have their purpose, because what we glean from Belvaux's trilogy is the reassurance (rare on film, with its terror of inattention) that people are both important and unimportant, and that heroes and leading ladies, in life as in art, can fade into extras before our eyes. Even romance, the most reliable ingredient of cinema, is laced with nervous impurity: do Cécile and Alain really wind up as the perfect couple, or as a pair of compatible, credulous fools? Is the look that Pascal bestows upon his wife, deep in her morphine sleep, one of adoration or pity? As for Bruno's faith in world revolution, it is as ethereal and treacherous as the snow through which he finally climbs—a dark speck amid the whiteness, he looks like the last Nietzschean in the world. These movies lack, perhaps, the gasp of rapture that Krzysztof Kieslowski brought to his "Three Colors" trilogy, the close of which saw figures from all three films emerging from a single shipwreck; but Belvaux's feeling for frail lives is more than a match for the cleverness of his design, and one has to be impressed by any body of work that runs for more than three hundred and forty minutes yet, despite being set in France, features no sex whatsoever. I thought it was required by law. ♦

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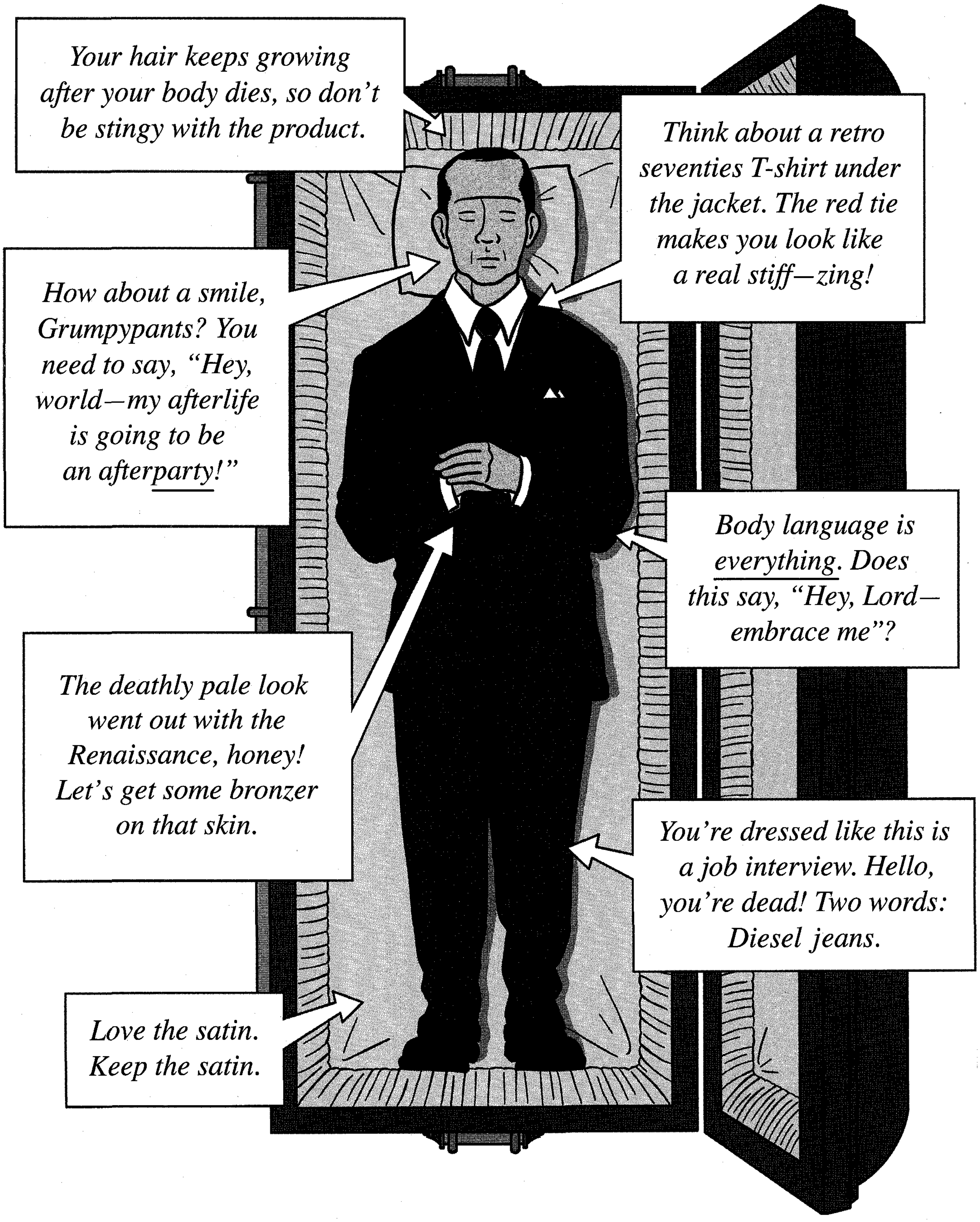
THE BACK PAGE BY ALEX GREGORY

QUEER EYE FOR THE DEAD GUY


Your hair keeps growing after your body dies, so don't be stingy with the product.
Think about a retro seventies T-shirt under the jacket. The red tie makes you look like a real stiff—zing!
How about a smile, Grumpypants? You need to say, "Hey, world—my afterlife is going to be an afterparty!"
Body language is everything. Does this say, "Hey, Lord—embrace me"?
The deathly pale look went out with the Renaissance, honey! Let's get some bronzer on that skin.
You're dressed like this is a job interview. Hello, you're dead! Two words: Diesel jeans.
Love the satin. Keep the satin.

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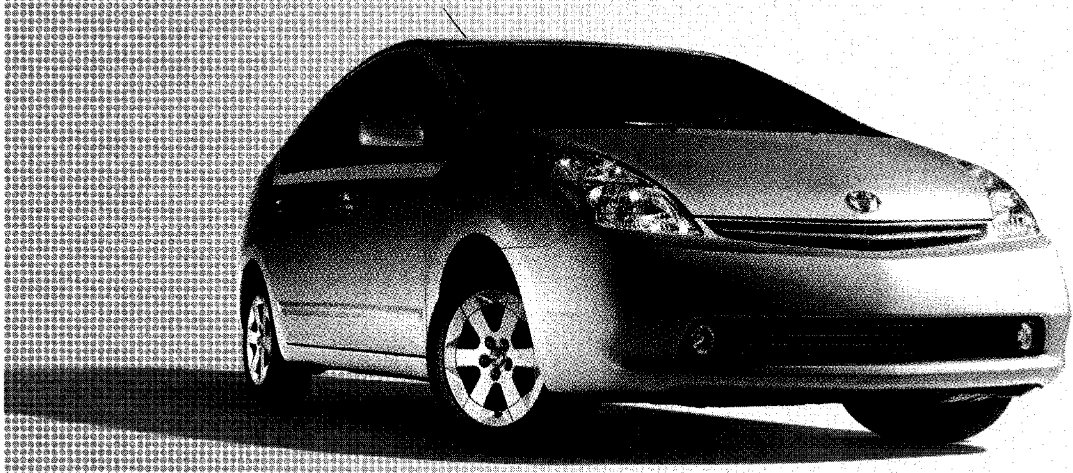

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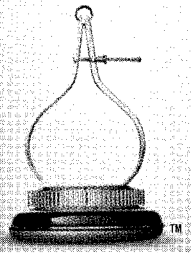

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